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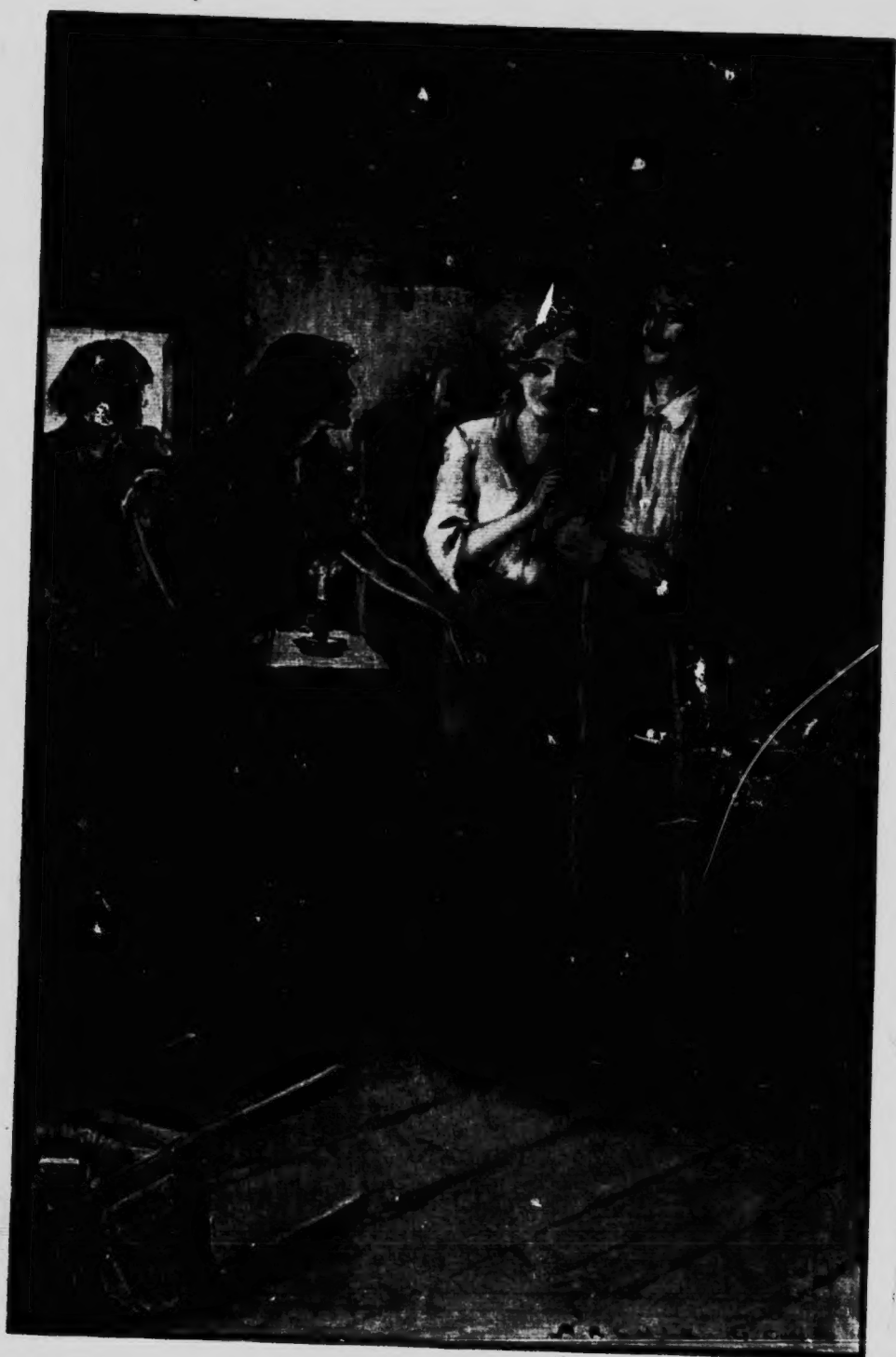
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"MY BACK AGAINST THE DOOR, MY HAND ON MY REVOLVER."—Page 94.

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*Can. Marchmont,
Arthur W.*

IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM

BY
ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT

AUTHOR OF
"BY WIT OF WOMAN," "THE QUEEN'S ADVOCATE,"
"A COURIER OF FORTUNE," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

A CHANCE MEETING

"**D**O you mean to take me for a spy?"

I had hard work to prevent myself laughing at the man to his face and it is no light matter to laugh at these self-satisfied, bullying officials in Russian Poland. Some of them have too much power.

"Do I understand that you refuse to answer my questions and shew me your papers?"

"And what if I do?" He had burst into my room in the little inn at Bratinsk as I sat reading my paper over a cigar, and without any preface had fired his questions at me with the peremptory incivility of the average police agent. My temper had taken the intrusion badly.

He shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows. "I am a police agent from Warsaw and must know your business in Bratinsk."

At that I saw light. I recalled a paragraph I had just read in the Warsaw paper. I pointed to it. "Is this the key to your visit?"

"Ah, you have read it," he replied with that offensive manner in which these people always contrive to imply that everything you say or do is a matter of suspicion.

"I'll read it again now with more interest," said

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I. I did so very deliberately, to gain time to cool my temper and see how it could possibly affect me.

"We are in a position to state that a raid was made two nights ago upon a house in the Kronplatz, which has long been suspected to be the Warsaw headquarters of a branch of the dangerous patriotic society known as the 'P.F.F.' (Polish Freedom Fraternity). The house was deserted at the time, but important papers were found which revealed the existence of a conspiracy of wide and far-reaching extent. The complete break-up of the powerful organization of the Freedom Fraternity is likely to be the result of the raid, and several well-known patriots are said to be implicated by the discoveries. Among the names rumoured is that of Count Peter Valdemar, once well known as the 'Stormy Petrel' of Polish politics."

"Do you take me for Count Peter Valdemar?" I asked.

"I did not come here to be fooled," was the angry reply. "If you will not comply with my demands, you must accompany me to Warsaw."

I saw the prudence of not angering him. "I am Robert Anstruther, an Englishman, and have been here about three weeks, shooting over the estate of my friend, Count Ladislas Tuleski."

"Your passport?"

"Here it is. You have a very unpleasant manner," I could not help adding, as I took out my pocket book. By a curious chance I had three passports; my own and that of my chum, Robert Gar-

rett and his sister, Margaret. They were to have come out with me on their way to Turkey, but had been prevented at the last moment. I picked mine out and handed it to him. "It's properly viséd, you'll see."

He assumed a very profound air as he read it. "You speak Polish very well for an Englishman," he said.

"I speak also German and French, and some Russian."

"You have no trace of the vile English accent."

"Is that meant for a compliment?" I asked lightly. It was no use to get angry again.

"And you are a friend of Count Ladislas Tule-ski? You are, no doubt, aware that he is a suspect."

I smiled as I thought of my friend's airy impulsiveness and almost butterfly repudiation of responsibility. "I am surprised he should be suspected of doing anything seriously."

"He is," was the snappy reply. "And his friends are naturally objects of interest just now. Where is he?"

"I don't know. I heard of him last in London."

"And you are from London? It is at least a coincidence. Do you know Count Peter Valde-mar?"

"I believe I met him once." I remembered that I had seen him at my friend's hotel in London.

"Another coincidence," he returned drily. There was a pause during which he regarded me fixedly, pretty much as though I were a criminal. "You

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would perhaps, like to shew me all your papers, to satisfy me of the truth of your story."

That was what an American would call "the limit."

I got up and opened the door. "I have told you the truth and I don't allow any man to question my word. You'd better go before I lose my temper."

I stood six feet without bootheels; I had been the heaviest number five in my college eight that Corpus had had for years; and was in the pink of condition. He saw that I meant business and rose.

"I don't question your word," he began.

"Are you going?"

He went out into the corridor. "We shall probably require you to come to Warsaw."

"If you wish to arrest me do it, and be hanged to you."

"You mustn't talk like that, and had better leave Bratinsk. So long as you stay here you will be under surveillance—" the rest of his sentence was lost, for I slammed the door in his face.

The attempt at any kind of surveillance over my movements would drive me out of Bratinsk like a shot; and I should have been much more annoyed by the incident but for the fact that I had been daily expecting my visit to be brought to a close by the weather. I had been very lucky to hit such an open season; but it was late in December, and the snow was so long overdue that by leaving at once I should miss very little sport.

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I determined to go, therefore. I had a pig-sticking fixed for the following day; and that should be the last.

It was not at all unlikely, too, that Warsaw would afford me some excitement. The papers were full of hints about impending troubles from the strikers and revolutionary party, consequent upon the ominous unrest in St. Petersburg; and I settled that I might as well go there for a couple of days to see the fun, and then rush home for Christmas.

With this plan in my thoughts I strolled up to the railway station to see about trains.

As I reached the building the stationmaster, a very busy little official, named Blauben, came running up to me.

"Ah, mister, mister,"—he knew this one word of English and thought it the correct way to address an Englishman—"you can do me a service. I beg of you. I am in sore perplexity."

"What is the matter?"

"A country-woman of yours. She sets me at defiance and does not understand a word I say. The last train for three hours has gone and the law is that I shut the station. She will not go out."

"Do you want me to put her out for you?"

"No, no; you can explain to her that the law requires the station to be shut now; and they are very strict because of this last conspiracy they have discovered. No one is allowed to remain, mister. Besides, my wife is waiting for me; and you know

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her. She is not patient when the dinner is kept waiting. Ah, mister?"

"Where is she?"

I pictured to myself a typical strong-minded British matron, or spinster, stern of feature, sturdy of will, Baedeker in hand, insistent upon her rights, and holding the station grimly against the chattering officious little Pole; and I looked for some fun. But, instead, he led me up to a girl, who contradicted in every particular my anticipation. She was some twenty years of age, well-dressed and as pretty as a painting; straight, regular features, flaxen hair and blue eyes; glorious eyes meant for laughter, but now clouded with trouble and nervous agitation. A picture of pale, shrinking misery that went straight to my heart.

"Here is an English mister who will explain," said the stationmaster with elaborate gesture.

I raised my hat and as she glanced at me, the colour flushed into her cheeks and her large eyes seemed to dilate with a new fear connected with my presence. In a moment it flashed into my thoughts that she had understood him quite well.

"The station master tells me you are a country-woman of mine," I said in English; "and has asked me to explain that the station is to be closed now."

There was a pause, her look one of blank dismay. She bit her lip and then stammered slowly with a rich foreign accent, "Zank you, sir; I cannot go. I wait for ze train and zomeone."

I accepted this as though it were the purest Eng-

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lish and gave a free translation of it to the station master. But he was bluntness itself. His wife was waiting for him, and he had the law on his side.

I turned to the girl again and said, trying German this time: "They have curious laws in this country, and one of them requires the station to be closed."

Her face lighted with unmistakable relief and she answered in the same language: "My servant has gone to make some arrangements, I only wish to wait for a train."

I interpreted this also; but the man was obdurate. "She cannot wait here. No one is allowed—by law."

"But I *must* wait," she broke in, and blushed vividly and trembled at having given away the fact that she understood him.

"Let me offer a suggestion. I am an Englishman, Robert Anstruther, and if you will permit, I will wait with you outside until your servant returns. These officials are obstinate just now because of some plot that has been discovered; and he will only send for the police if you do not comply."

At the mention of the police she rose quickly, all the colour left her face and her lips quivered.

The stationmaster beamed his thanks upon me as he bowed us out and turned the key upon us.

"These little officials are very touchy," I said, when we stood outside and I saw she was quite undecided what to do.

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She paused, and then said impulsively: "I don't know what you will think. I—I am so ashamed."

"I hope not. There is no need."

"I mean about—I am not English."

"Are you not? You answered me in English," I said gravely.

A little blush signalled vexation. "As if you did not know. It is no subject for laughter."

"God forbid that I should laugh. You are too evidently in deep trouble."

"And you know that I understood him all the time."

I bowed. "I ask no questions."

"I should like to explain, but I cannot. Oh, how humiliating!" she cried, and the distress and trouble in her tone touched me deeply.

"I am only a stranger, but if I can help you, I beg you to give me the opportunity."

"You cannot. You cannot; oh, I——" She left the sentence unfinished and turned away to stare along the road leading to the village, her arm resting upon a gate near. "If he comes back——" I heard her murmur; but the rest of the sentence was lost.

She was a mystery, and a very fascinating mystery too. Who could she be? Why travelling alone? What was her trouble? Why pretending to be English? Why had she started so at the mention of the police? These and a dozen other questions rushed into my mind in the minute or two that followed. I cudgelled my wits for something

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to say; some way of breaking down the barrier that prevented her making some kind of use of me.

The visit of the police agent having turned my thoughts to the subject of the conspiracy, I wondered whether she could be in any way connected with it. A fugitive, perhaps? But the idea was preposterous. She was surely the very incarnation of innocence; about as well fitted for a conspirator as I was for a police agent.

She turned suddenly and broke in upon my thoughts by saying, hurriedly and nervously, this time in Polish: "Thank you, sir, for what you have done and also for your offer; but I must not detain you longer."

I smiled. "You are not detaining me; but I will go, of course, if you wish."

She hesitated. I hoped it was from reluctance to dismiss me. Then she put out her hand impulsively and said with an air of constraint and a very wistful look: "My secret is safe with you, I know."

"I should like to make it a condition of silence that you let me help you further."

"No, no. That is impossible; impossible," she cried quickly. "My—my servant will be back soon." The fear in her eyes increased as she spoke of him.

"Well, don't forget the name—Anstruther. I'm at the *Petersburg Inn*, should you—or your friends think me likely to be of any use."

She shook her head. "No, no. Thank you. Thank you."

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I raised my hat and turned away. I would have given a lot to be able to find some excuse for staying with her; and when I looked after her, chance found me a reason to go back. She was walking slowly in the direction of the village, her back towards me, and I saw her handkerchief fall.

I picked it up and hurried after her. Hearing my step she turned so quickly as to suggest alarm.

"You have dropped this," I said, handing her the little dainty lace trifle. As I held it out the initials "V.D." embroidered in the corner, lay uppermost.

She took it hurriedly, glanced from the initials to my face, and then thanked me.

Just then a man came hastily round a bend in the path some twenty paces ahead of us. She bit her lip at sight of him and her nervous confusion increased.

"My—my servant. You must go, please."

Surprised that she should shew such fear of a servant, I drew aside with a smile and she walked on.

Then I looked at the servant; and the mystery about her at once became clearer and yet deeper.

It is one of the freaks of my otherwise treacherous memory, never to forget a face; and despite his disguise I recognized the man at once. I knew him by his remarkable eyes—small, piercing and almost black in hue.

It was Count Peter Valdemar, the "Stormy Petrel" of Polish politics; the originator of a dozen

A CHANCE MEETING

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conspiracies. He was dressed as a servant, wore a close-cropped red wig, and was clean shaven.

I recalled the police agent's words instantly; and the danger to the girl appealed to me. For her sake I resolved to warn him.

They spoke together, and from his glances in my direction, I guessed she was telling him what I had done. As I approached them, he assumed the deferential air of a servant.

"A word with you," I said.

He was full of surprise. "With me, sir?"

I drew him aside. "I have no desire to pry into your affairs, but I wish to warn you that you are in great danger of discovery here."

"Danger! Of what? Surely you are mistaken, sir?" He spoke with a flourish of the hand and a bow, but his piercing eyes were fixed intently upon mine.

"I am a friend of Count Ladislas Tuleski, and I met you once or twice in his rooms in London a year ago. You are Count Peter Valdemar. This morning a police agent from Warsaw visited me, and regarded me as a suspect because of my friendship with the Count, and because I admitted that I had known you. Take the warning from me as a friend; and be on your guard. If I have recognized you, others may."

It was safer for us both not to be seen together, so I walked off leaving him a very much surprised Count indeed.

CHAPTER II

ON THE DEVIL'S STAIRCASE.

I HAD not walked three hundred yards towards the village when I met the police agent hurrying stationwards at a pace which would quickly bring him face to face with Count Peter and his companion.

This must be prevented at any cost, so I stopped him.

"I wish to speak to you."

"They told me you had gone to the station."

This was all right, for it showed he was following me. "Our interview ended hastily this morning because I thought you doubted my word and I was angry. I see now that you were doing your duty. Come back with me to the inn, and let us talk things over."

"You can say what you have to say here," he answered. He was a surly dog: but I dared not let him pass me.

"Scarcely that; because I can adopt your suggestion and prove to you, by letters and so forth, that I am what I told you; an Englishman and not a spy."

"Why do you change like this?" His suspicious tone again.

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"The reason is simple. I have decided to leave here to-morrow probably, and don't wish to be bothered by your spies meanwhile. It is simpler to convince you with proofs." I linked my arm in his. "Come along, we must understand one another better. I am not the suspicious individual you think and you are no doubt a better fellow than I deemed."

He was a little beast, only fit to be kicked; but I thought of the girl and smothered my natural inclinations.

By the time we reached my rooms I had worked some of his suspicions loose; and when I laid before him letters from my sister and friends at home, and showed him such things as my cheque book, letter of credit, and so on, he was sufficiently satisfied to have a bottle of wine with me.

Over this his tongue was loosened and we discussed the conspiracy, which he admitted was widespread and in some respects more dangerous than any which had threatened the Empire for years. Its especial danger lay in the skill with which the leaders had attempted to blend industrial discontent with political intrigue; and so form a union among vast masses of the population in many industrial cities.

The practical grievances of the workers and the many wrongs of the rural population were being used by the democratic theorists, the dreamers and the political agitators to foment discontent; and I knew enough of Russia to be aware that such

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highly inflammable materials as these might easily be heaped together and then fanned into one huge simultaneous explosion all over the Empire, terrible enough to startle the world.

In Russian Poland the cause was the old one—national independence; and it was in this that Count Peter Valdemar had taken a part and that my friend Ladislav was involved.

I repeated my surprise that my friend should be regarded as dangerous.

"He is a leader; and at such times any man may be a source of danger," was the reply.

"And this Count Peter—where is he?" I asked casually.

"He is probably making for the German frontier, with the intention of flying to England. He was at Warsaw; but disappeared. Your country has much to answer for in harbouring all these plotters."

"If it comes to that we have a few anarchists of our own, and they are harboured on this side of the Channel."

"Not in Russia. But I don't think the Count will escape us this time. He is well known to so many of us."

"And if you catch him?" A significant smile answered me and a tilt of the eyebrows.

"You have a wonderful police system," said I, admiringly.

"We shall catch him on the frontier, sir. Make no mistake. No man can get through the net we have spread there."

ON THE DEVIL'S STAIRCASE 17

I emptied my glass. "Well, here's luck to all who deserve it. And now, about myself?"

"I will communicate with Warsaw; and meantime go where you will or stay here if you prefer."

I had succeeded in detaining him nearly a couple of hours, and by this time the Count and his companion ought to be out of the place; so I ordered my horse, resolved to go for a ride to test the truth of the little beggar's assurance that I was not to be watched.

I chose the southern road and as the ground was very hard I went at a leisurely pace. I was not followed; and as soon as I had satisfied myself of this, my thoughts slipped back to the incident at the railway station, and a pair of blue eyes that had looked with such desolate wistfulness into mine. Would the Count get away? Had they gone already? Would chance ever bring us together again? Could I not do something on my own account to help chance? That was more my way; and I set to work thinking how I could use my friendship with Ladislas to accomplish my end.

I was still following this train of thought when I reached the hill known locally as the "Devil's Staircase." Bratinsk stands on a plateau; and about five miles to the south, this hill, one of the most dangerous I have ever seen on account of its fearful gradient and deadly twists and turns, leads to the plains below. From the top there is a fine view over the Batak Levels, a stretch of fertile country

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extending for miles to the foot-hills beyond. It was a favourite spot of mine and on reaching it now I dismounted, tethered my horse near and strolled to smoke a cigar and continue my reverie.

I was inclined to shake hands with myself at the thought of using Ladislas. He would surely be able to tell me enough of Count Valdemar to put me on the track; and I was just thinking how to describe the girl whose initials I believed to be "V. D." when I caught the grating of wheels, followed rapidly by the throbbing sound of horses' feet.

Some one must be in a deuce of a hurry, I thought, as I looked back along the road. Some one was, surely enough. Not a couple of hundred yards from the brink of the hill came a light caleche with two occupants drawn by a pair of horses at full gallop. What was the fool of a driver about? To dash down the Devil's Staircase at that mad pace meant death. No horses ever foaled could make the sharp turns and twists of that zigzag, treacherous, deadly incline at a gallop.

I shouted a warning at the top of my voice; and then my heart seemed to leap in my breast and every vein in my body to chill like ice as the occupants of the caleche looked up, and I recognized Count Peter Valdemar and the girl who had been in my thoughts all that day.

As the runaways reached me I leapt down on to the road and I made a spring for the reins of the horse nearest me. I missed them and was rolled over and over, while the frightened beasts dashed

ON THE DEVIL'S STAIRCASE 19

on, the Count tearing and tugging and straining at the reins in a futile effort to stop them.

I jumped up and ran down the hill in pursuit. Just below, the road made an S-shaped curve, and the horses were round this and out of sight like a flash; and while I was racing after them round the first bend, I heard a shout in a man's voice, a girl's scream, and then the crashing sound of a smash.

I reached the scene in a few moments. The wreck had come at a point where the road turned at less than a right angle; and the sight of it sickened me with fear.

One horse was down, lying against a bank, bleeding profusely and kicking spasmodically in what I judged to be a death struggle. The other was on its feet and was plunging and tugging to free itself from the reins and harness which had got entangled in the wreck of the caleche. Under the body of the vehicle lay the Count, and as I did not for the moment see his companion, I guessed that she must be hidden under the wreckage too.

With a big effort I hoisted the vehicle sufficiently to drag out the Count; but the girl was not there.

Then I saw her lying behind a bush by the roadside. I ran to her and laid my finger on her pulse. With intense relief I found the beat; feeble it is true, but steady; and I poured some brandy into the cup of my flask and managed to get a little of it between her lips. A trembling sigh escaped her; and I returned to the Count.

The police agent was right. The Count would

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never cross the German frontier—he had crossed the farther one. I knew enough of first aid work to ascertain the cause. His neck was broken; and I guessed he had been thrown sideways on to his head, snapping the vertebrae. I drew the body to the side of the road and threw one of the rugs over it.

Next I freed the sound horse—thinking he might be needed—soothed him a bit and tethered him to a tree.

By this time the girl was fast recovering and I went back to her. I was administering another dose of the brandy when she opened her eyes.

“You!” she said.

“Yes, fortunately. Don’t worry about things. May I help you to sit up and take this, or can you manage it alone? That’s good,” I smiled as she sat up unaided.

“What has happened? Oh, I remember. The hill and then——” and she put her hands before her eyes for a moment.

“You have had a wonderful escape.”

The word confused her. “Did we escape then? Is he not following us? My uncle thought—oh, I understand; I thought you meant—but is he hurt?”

“Yes, badly.”

I had placed her so that her back was towards the wrecked carriage and the Count’s body; but at my words she turned and looked round. Her eyes were wide with horror. “Is he dead?” she asked.

ON THE DEVIL'S STAIRCASE 21

"But for a miracle you would have shared his fate."

She was silent for a moment and lifted her hands and let them fall with a sigh. "He would rather have had it so than have been captured; and he feared that this time. He was a hard, desperate man."

There was no sign of any strong emotion or great personal grief in this reference to him. It was far better so under the circumstances. But I did not quite know what to say.

Then she surprised me. "He told me to come to you if anything happened to him. You recognized him, he said."

"Yes, as Count Peter Valdemar. I warned him this morning."

"He told me. You are a friend of—Count Ladislav Tuleski?" She said this with just a suspicion of hesitation.

"An intimate friend. Do you know him?"

"Yes—I know him,—oh, yes: I——" she hesitated, glanced at me and stopped.

"He is one of my most intimate friends and one of the best fellows in the world," I said enthusiastically.

She made no reply, but glanced swiftly at me again and lowered her head.

"I think I can walk now," she said presently; and I helped her to rise. "I am not hurt, you see. It was only fright and shock."

"Thank God it was no worse," I cried. She did

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not seem to hear this. "Now, what do you wish to do?"

"I don't know. What ought I to do? My uncle—do you know the Count was my uncle?—or, rather, not my own uncle, no real blood relation."

"No, I had no idea."

"When the trouble came at Warsaw he had to fly, and he was carrying certain papers with instructions to friends of the Fraternity to show. A raid is expected there; and there are papers which threaten us all. Even my own dear mother is in danger. He told me to carry those papers through to Cracow at any cost; to get your help if need be, and to say that your friend, Count Ladislas, was also involved. I was to tell you this, if you showed any reluctance to help me. But now what can we do?" and she looked the picture of dismay.

"You were travelling as an English girl?"

"Yes, as Miss Mary Smith. He got passports for me in that name and for himself as Ivan Grubel, my servant."

"Where are they?"

"He has them and the rest of the papers. They are sewn into his coat."

"Why did he make all this methodical preparation?"

"He was recognized, I think, in Bratinsk. That was why we were driving away. He expected to be pursued."

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"If I get the coat, can you find the papers?"

"Yes, but—he is—dead;" and she shuddered.

"We have to think of the living. Yourself, my friend, and your mother."

It is not a pleasant thing to strip the coat off a dead man; but it had to be done. So I went and did it as quickly as I could. I took it back to her and she was hurriedly searching for the papers when she gave a little gasp of alarm and shrank close to me as a horseman appeared, picking his way very gingerly down the hill. It was my friend, the police agent from Warsaw. In a moment he took in the scene. He recognized me at once, and my companion a moment later.

"Ah, this is better luck than I expected. A smash, eh? So you didn't get far away after all? I knew I should catch you, but didn't hope to do it so soon. Where's Count Peter Valdemar?"

"You again, is it?" I said, with a smile. "This young lady, a countrywoman of mine, Miss Mary Smith, has met with an accident and her servant, named Ivan Grubel, has been killed. The horses ran away."

"Killed, eh? That's his coat then. Give that to me." My companion caught her breath and clutched my arm.

"You guessed too fast, my friend; you did so this morning, you know, as I showed you afterwards. This coat is mine;" and with that I slipped my arms into it and put it on.

"Yes, it's easy to see it's yours by the way it

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fits you," he sneered. My arms were some three inches too long for the sleeves and the body was ridiculously short. "I know you by this time. You must give me that coat. I saw the woman there searching the pockets for something."

"If you want it, you'd better come and take it. I shan't give it up unless you do."

"For your own sake don't mix up any more with this. If you are an Englishman, go away and leave me to deal with this woman. But give me that coat. You know to whom it belonged; and I must have it."

He dismounted and walked toward me.

"You had better keep your distance," I said quietly.

"You resist? Then I must do my duty. You are my prisoner."

The threat of arrest seemed to scare the girl badly, but without a second's hesitation she tried to shield me by taking everything on her own shoulders.

"I alone am responsible," she cried, stepping forward. "Give up the coat, Mr. Anstruther. It is I who should be the prisoner."

She acted pluckily, like the little brick she was, and with the best intentions in the world. But it was a huge mistake. She had practically given the whole thing away.

The significant leer of triumph on the police agent's face made it plain that he appreciated this.

CHAPTER III

VOLNA DRAKONA

I LOST no time in undeceiving the police agent. "You are plucking unshot birds," I said. "There is not going to be any arrest either of this lady or myself. You can end the thing anyhow you please, short of arresting either of us."

I was glad that that made him lose his temper. "Do you dare to disobey me?" he cried furiously.

I became personal and heaped fuel on the fire of his anger. "Don't be a foolish little person. You don't know how idiotic you look. You can do nothing. You are six inches shorter than I am, and I don't care a kopeck for your authority as a policeman."

He swore fluently and stamped his feet with rage. "You will answer for this," he shouted, using a very foul epithet. "I thought this morning you were a spy. Now I know it. You shall not insult me. In the name of the Czar, I call on you to submit."

I laughed at him with intentional aggravation. "You are a worse fool than I thought. I am a British subject; I have done no wrong; and I care no more for your Czar than I do for you. You have just insulted me grossly and the best thing you can do is to clear out."

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"You are a revolutionary, in league with this woman and the carrion there;" and he jerked his thumb toward the dead body.

I took no notice of this coarseness, but untethered the unhurt horse and led it over to my companion.

"We are going," I said to him. "I have told you that this is Miss Mary Smith; I have her passport here in my coat." I rummaged in the pockets, found two passports, and handed them to him.

He glanced at them and then pocketed them with a grin of self-satisfaction at his astuteness.

"Where are you going?"

"That is our own business. I will not let you follow us. Return me those passports," I said, threateningly. He did not see my object but backed away toward his horse. "Come, quick."

He hesitated a moment and then mounted hurriedly. "As they were in your coat they will connect you with these people," he said with a cunning leer.

I did not care a rap for this now; whether he kept or returned them. We could not possibly use them again, so I shrugged my shoulders and turned away. "Go to the devil," I said.

But he had a surprise for me. As my back was turned a pistol shot rang out, and the horse I was holding plunged and tore loose from me, limped down the hill and fell to the ground.

"Now we'll see about your tall talk, Mr. Englishman. You and the woman there will just march on ahead of me into Bratinsk; and if either of you

so much as look round, I'll fire. Mind that. By God."

His weapon was levelled at my head and my companion again showed the stuff she was made of. With a little cry she dashed right in front of me dead in the line of fire.

"You must not shoot," she said, quite steadily. "This gentleman has done nothing but help me after the accident."

"We'll find out all about that at Bratinsk," replied the man. "Now march, you two."

It was an ugly situation; but I did not take the police agent as seriously as did "Mary Smith." They are bullies to the core, so long as it is safe to bully; and this fellow was a particularly brutal brute of his brutal class.

There is one thing they are all afraid of, however, the censure of their superiors; and their superiors hate the investigation which follows when anything happens to foreigners in general, and Englishmen and Americans in particular.

I felt quite confident, therefore, that he would not fire, and that the chief danger we ran was that his weapon might go off by accident. Moreover, he was probably as bad a shot as they nearly all are. So I put up a bluff.

I drew my companion to one side and looking the man square in the face I walked a couple of paces toward him. Instead of shooting he backed his horse and warned me again. This satisfied me,

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"You can fire if you like. You know I am an Englishman and if you shoot me there'll be a row."

"Do as I say," he shouted with an oath.

I paused and then said very deliberately: "I'll see you in hell first. Fire at me if you dare."

A little gasp of alarm from the girl was lost in a volley of oaths from the police agent.

Then the luck veered once more to our side. Inadvertently his spur touched his horse's flank and the animal, taking his loud tones as addressed to it, began to fidget and prance so that he could not have taken aim had he wished. The figure he cut was quite laughable.

But it was my chance and I took it. I picked up a stone and flung it at the horse. This set it kicking and plunging desperately so that the none too skilful rider was nearly unhorsed. Choosing my moment I ran up, seized the hand which held the revolver and wrenched the weapon away without any trouble at all.

That was the end of the fighting so far as he was concerned; for he drove his spurs home and clattered away up the hill.

I judged that he was afraid I might now do the shooting which he had threatened so glibly; and mingled with his fear was the belief that, as he had shot our horse and had thus destroyed the means of our flight, he could safely ride off to fetch assistance.

"That's a good riddance anyhow," said I with a

laugh, when he had disappeared. "I think you're the pluckiest girl I ever knew."

"I was so frightened," she declared.

"Yes, so frightened that you actually put yourself right in front of his revolver. That's the kind of fright I mean; only I call it pluck."

"It was nothing. But you should not have taken any part in this miserable affair. You have compromised yourself with the police and may get into all kinds of trouble."

"Don't you think we had better start for Cracow? That fellow won't be away longer than he can help, and I have to get a little scheme ready for him before he returns. The sooner we start the safer."

"But what can we do about——" and she glanced to where the Count's body lay.

"If we are to think of the living, we can do nothing. He has been recognized and when the police return they will care for the body and something can be done from Warsaw."

"It seems heartless to leave him," she murmured in distressed perplexity.

"There is no other way; so if you please we will start. I'll tell you my plan as we walk. Your mother's safety is in the balance, remember." She yielded then and we set out.

"I think we shall get through without any great trouble. There is a train from Bratinsk somewhere about eight o'clock, which will put us in Cracow in a few hours."

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"But I have no passport now, to pass the frontier."

"Fortunately, I can arrange that. My first plan is to send the police off on a false scent. There is a peasant family, not a mile from the top of the hill—where my horse is, by the way—and they will do anything for me. I helped them out of some trouble when I was here last year, and they think a lot of it. With this police agent away from Bratinsk for a few hours, we can get off secretly and safely."

At the top of the hill I found my horse, put "Miss Smith" on his back and handed her the coat which had been the first cause of trouble.

"I shall need the coat for my plan; so find the papers which are sewn into it and be ready to rip them out the moment we reach the cottage."

"But you?" she protested.

"No protest, please. I am good for more than a mile at fair speed."

"You do all this for a stranger," she said, her eyes lighting as she looked down at me.

"Oh, we shan't always be strangers. Keep him going. I can't talk and run at the same time. Be merciful;" and with that we set off at a good round trot. I held to the stirrup and so had no difficulty in keeping up.

In about five minutes we turned off the road and the cottage was soon in sight. By good fortune the man I sought, Michel, was in the patch of

garden and greeted me with a smile. I came to the point at once.

"Michel, you have often asked for a chance of repaying that little debt. You can do it now. I want you and your sister, Testa, to help me. You are to ride my horse and your sister yours, and start at once. Ride down the Devil's Staircase, strike out any way you like at the bottom; ride for four or five hours; you in the name of Ivan Grubel, your sister as Mary Smith, an English girl. At the end of the ride, which must be as near a railway station as you can manage, turn my horse adrift to go where he will; and then make your way home secretly. And no one must know of your absence. You'll do this?"

"Why yes, Excellency. Testa, Testa;" and he ran in calling his sister.

"Now for the coat? It will be the best possible thing to create the false trail with."

"The papers are here in the lining."

"Get them out then at once, please. We have no minutes to lose." I handed her a knife and she found them.

Michel came round the cottage a minute later leading the horse for his sister just as Testa herself appeared ready to start.

"Good-evening, Excellency," she said, her brown eyes dancing at the thought of an adventure.

"You grow stronger every day, Testa, and prettier," I said. "Now, Michel, wear this coat,

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take care that every one has a full view of it; and when you get rid of the horse, strap it on his back. Mind, you two, my liberty may depend upon you. God speed."

"Trust me," replied Michel as he mounted.

I helped Testa to the saddle. "Don't look scared, child," I said; for her face had clouded at my words. "I shall be in no danger if you do this thing well. Off with you."

"By the help of the Virgin," returned Testa; and away they went helter skelter towards the Devil's Staircase.

As soon as they were out of sight we set off for Bratinsk, across the fields; and I explained the next part of my plan. This was to use the two passports of Bob Garrett and his sister.

"I have not told you my real name," said my companion.

"We scarcely seem to have had time to speak of anything yet. We've been pretty busy, you see."

"It is Volna Drakona. My father is dead; my dear mother is in feeble health. I have a half-brother and half-sister—Paul and Katinka."

"The passports will give you another sort of brother till we get to Cracow. Only for a few hours, however, if all goes well. Volna! I have never heard that name before."

"It is my mother's——" she said simply. Then, "You like it?"

"It is southern in it's sweetness."

"My mother is from the South. Do you think I could write to her and let her know that all is well with me? She may hear of my uncle's death, and the anxiety will almost kill her. We are deeply attached to one another."

"There is no reason why you should not. And from Cracow it may be safe to telegraph."

"You speak as if we were quite certain of getting through."

"Why shouldn't we? I have had another thought. My servant is at Bratinsk and I shall use him to create another scent for the police. I shall send him off toward Warsaw in my name while we go to Cracow as the two Garretts. I look for no trouble in Bratinsk. The police agent is not likely to think we shall venture to return there. I expect he will just get the help he needs and rattle back to make the arrest. He will then follow Michel and his sister; and as this will take up some hours at least, we ought to be clear away and near Cracow before he even returns to Bratinsk."

"You make it seem very simple and easy."

"So it ought to be; but I shall feel better when we are in the train speeding west. There is one thing, by-the-by, you had better make some kind of change in your appearance. I can do it easily by shaving my beard and changing my clothes. Do you think you could buy something in Bratinsk? Your description is sure to be telegraphed in all directions."

We discussed the means of doing this and had

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scarcely settled matters when we reached Bratinsk. Having arranged where to meet, I went to the inn and Volna to procure the change of costume.

The dusk was beginning to fall and deeming it best to be cautious, I entered the inn by a side door and succeeded in slipping up to my rooms unnoticed.

My servant, Felsen, was not there; but afraid to lose time in waiting, and unwilling to risk asking for him, I set to work and shaved off my beard and moustache. As I changed my clothes, I found the police agent's revolver; and took it with me.

As Felsen always looked after my things I did not notice anything amiss, except that he seemed to keep them very carelessly; but as soon as I went into the sitting room, which opened from the bedroom, I scented trouble.

Every drawer and cupboard in the place had been ransacked, and papers and books were all left in the greatest confusion.

The reason was plain. It was the result of a police visit. My friend of the Devil's Staircase had set his comrades to work. Instinctively I ran back into the bedroom and destroyed the evidences of my shaving operation, and was in the act of leaving the room when I heard voices approaching it.

I had barely time to step into a cupboard when the door was opened and two men entered. One was Felsen, the other a stranger. His curt, sharp tone and manner suggested the police.

They passed through into the sitting room beyond.

"Your master has not been back then, it seems?"

"I shouldn't think he'll come back after what you say."

"He'll probably be brought back." This with a sneer. "We know how to deal with spies and traitors."

There was a pause and then Felsen said: "I suppose if he's caught he won't be let out for a long while."

"Our prison doors only open one way easily," chuckled the other.

"Then I may as well look after myself, I suppose."

"Yes. He's evidently made a fool of you."

"Well, it's my turn now. Have a cigar?"

I heard matches struck and smelt my best cigars.

"We can wait downstairs as well as here," said the police agent. "I'll lock the doors this time to make sure." He came into the bedroom locked the door on the inside and then went back. The other door was then locked and the two men went downstairs.

Fortunately he had left the key in the bedroom door, and the instant the way was clear, I went out, crept along the corridor and down the back stairway to the door by which I had entered.

I gained the street safely and walked away toward the railway station, trusting to the gloom of

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the evening and my shaven face to save me from recognition.

By the action of the police and the fact that they were already on the look-out for me had crumpled up my plan. And there was still worse to come.

CHAPTER IV

A HORSEDEALING TRANSACTION

AS I hurried to the station I tried to think over the position coolly and carefully.

In the first place, I was now a fugitive from the police; but as I had done no wrong, the fact had a sort of fascination for me. The scent of adventure and the prospective excitement attracted me, and the idea of a trial of wits with the authorities roused every combative instinct in my nature.

Even had there been no one else involved, I should have gone through with the thing for its own sake. But there was Volna. Her safety and that of her mother depended upon me; and that fact was the most powerful incentive I could have had to urge me to my utmost effort. The thought of helping such a splendid girl was just a sheer delight.

Those papers had to be got to Cracow. The mother's safety required this; and the risk involved in the attempt formed the spice of the adventure. I had powerful and influential friends both at home and on the continent who would readily help me to get out of any bother so far as matters had gone at present; but it might be a very difficult thing if in the present excited state of the empire, I was caught helping the "P.F.F." by carrying seditious docu-

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ments for revolutionary purposes. Volna also had run no great risk as yet. The mere fact that she was travelling with Count Peter Valdemar was not by itself likely to involve her in any serious consequences. If the papers could have been destroyed, therefore, we could easily have put an end to the complication. But this was impossible. Their delivery in Cracow was imperative.

We stood thus at the dividing line between safety and risk; and there was nothing for it but to go through with the matter to the end.

My experience at the inn had its lesson. I recognized that I must move very warily indeed in making any inquiries at the station. The fussy little station-master, Blauben, might recognize me despite the change in my appearance; and I did not at all relish the prospect of interviewing him.

But in this one respect the luck was with me. I was surprised to see a small crowd of people at the generally deserted station, and it was an easy matter to mingle with them without being observed.

That was all the luck there was, however, as the reason for the crowd spelt further disaster to my plans of escape. The place was in a hubbub of excitement; and I soon learnt that there had been a very serious accident on the line at a place called Pulta, some seven or eight miles west of Bratinsk,

As a result of this the line to Cracow was blocked. There would be no train going west that night.

The people in the station were travellers from

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the opposite direction who had been put out and told, with the usual courtesy of the railway authorities, that they must shift for themselves until the line was clear. They might think themselves lucky, I overheard little Blauben tell one man, if they got on by noon the following day.

This was check with a vengeance; if not check-mate.

I hung about for some time with the object of ascertaining the chance of getting a train in the other direction—anything to get out of Bratinsk—and was pretending to study one of the time bills when I caught my own name.

"Know the Englishman, Anstruther? Of course I do." It was Blauben's voice. "If he comes here, I'll stop him."

"We think he may try and bolt."

"How's he going to bolt? There's no train west and nothing east except the midnight express. But what's it all about?" The reply was given in low tone and escaped me. But part of the station-master's answer was enough.

"Spy? Rubbish. Why he was here shooting last year. You people would find spies growing on gooseberry bushes. No. I have already told a hundred of you that there will be no train"—this to a questioner in a tone of exasperation; and I saw him hurry off gesticulating frantically. I could do no good by waiting longer, so I slipped out of the station, and went back to the village to meet Volna.

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After all, the accident at Pulta might not prove an unmitigated evil. The few sentences I had overheard showed that the police were watching the station for me; and an attempt to leave would probably have landed us right into their hands.

Then it occurred to me that we might even turn the accident to good account. If we could get to Pulta soon, we could give an excellent reason for our presence; that we wished to inquire about some friend supposed to have been in the wrecked train; and, as the line from there to Cracow would be open, we could do the journey after all by rail.

Pultra by the road was some ten miles, and a rough hilly road it was. Too far and too rough for Volna to attempt to walk. To hire any kind of conveyance was of course out of the question; as it would lay a trail which even a blind policeman could follow. I had a spare horse at the inn; but for the same reason I dared not attempt to take it out of the stable.

In that part of Poland, however, one deal can always be made without exciting any comment or surprise. Anyone will trade a horse with you, and at any time of the day or night. I believe a man would not be in the least surprised to be called out of bed at midnight for the purpose; and I am sure he would gladly get up for the sheer pleasure of the deal. It is the one great pastime, or as near to a pastime, as the older men of that district care to get.

But to obtain a saddle was another matter; while

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even to have asked for such a thing as a side saddle would have stirred enough curiosity to set the gossips' tongues click-clacking all over the village. There was nothing for it therefore except that Volna should ride bareback; and as I should have to lead her horse, there was no use in getting one for myself.

Volna was waiting for me when I reached the appointed place. She had made a considerable change in her appearance. A long fur cloak covered her dress, and in place of her former dainty headgear she was wearing a close fur turban.

Wishing to try the effect of my own altered appearance, I assumed a sort of slouching walk and made as if to pass her.

"Did you think I should not know you?" she asked.

"I was rather hoping you would not. I am supposed to be disguised."

She laughed. "I should know you anywhere."

"Then we must trust that other eyes are not so keen as yours," said I, feeling a little crestfallen.

"Or that they are not so interested in recognizing you. What about the train?"

"None but bad news;" and I told her what had occurred and how I proposed to manage. She agreed at once, but was for walking.

"I think I can walk ten miles," she declared readily.

"There is no need. It is a rough, hilly road; and there is a man at the other end of the village

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from whom I can buy a horse without any chance of rousing suspicions."

"It would not be more hilly for me than for you, would it?"

"I think you had better have the horse."

"Then I will say no more," she agreed. "I am afraid my disguise is not much more successful than yours," she added, as we walked on.

"It might have been awkward if neither had recognized the other, mightn't it?"

"I hadn't thought of that."

"You would have to hide your face, if you don't want to be known."

"I expect I look an awful fright."

"The more disguised you are the better," said I. She laughed. "It is good to hear you laugh in the midst of all—this uncertainty."

"It cannot be so very dreadful if you can manage to pay such neat compliments Mr.—Anstruther."

"You find that name a bit troublesome, eh?"

"Don't you think you are worth taking some trouble for? But it is hard."

"Lucky that I'm going to change it while we are together."

"Change it?"

"We'll talk that all over on the road to Pulta. Here's the place where I hope to get the horse. It may take a little time. Will you wait for me?"

There is a rough kind of recognized procedure in horsedealing in that district; but as I had had

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more than one experience of the kind I knew how to act.

I crossed to the house and seeing a light in the stable behind, guessed I should find the man bedding his horses. He did not know me, but I had heard of him.

"Good-evening, Andreas," I said in a rather surly tone, as if I had a grievance against him; and without another word I walked up to the four horses one after the other and looked them over. He took no notice, but went on forking the bedding. This was all strictly in accordance with etiquette.

I came out of the last stall shrugging my shoulders and laughing contemptuously. "Blauben is a little fool. He said I should find some horses here. Good-night. There isn't one worth a couple of roubles."

The last sentence he understood to mean that I might possibly deal. He dashed his fork on the ground and came toward me, saying very angrily: "What's that? Who are you? Who sent you here?"

"Old Blauben at the station."

"And do you think you know anything about horses? You don't know even how to look at them?"

"I have a chestnut that's worth the whole string. I thought there was something to buy here. I suppose he thought I wanted meat for a bouillon factory. Good-night."

"Wait, there, wait, you long imp of ignorance.

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Do you want to make a match with your chestnut? Where is it?"

I laughed. "If these crooks of yours saw mine they'd learn how to move. Here, smoke, you old owner of dogs' meat;" and I handed him a cigar.

"Holy Virgin, what do I hear?" he cried, throwing up his hands, and putting a lantern near my face. He knew well enough now that I had come to trade; and was happy. But we kept up the farce a little longer; he abusing my chestnut and I his four nags.

His next object was to find out which horse I had selected; but I kept this from him carefully. At length I pointed to one that I would not have had as a gift.

"I'm going to give my dogs a treat one day, I think they could manage with that. How much for it, if I give you back the hide and the feet?"

He grinned. "You know a nine horse when you see one, after all," he said. "You shall have him—three hundred roubles." About £30 this.

"Kopecks, you mean. Good-night."

"Wait, wait. Was there ever such an impatient fool as you? Do you really want him?"

"No, only I didn't want this long walk for nothing: and I'm taking some horses to Noshti Fair."

"Isn't there one of the others you'd care for? Don't be in a hurry."

"I'm in no hurry. What about these others?"

Then the real bargaining began. He put a price

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on the horse I wished to have; and we chaffered and smoked and swore and abused one another in the way these bargains are made. I dared not hurry the matter too much. He would boast all over the village the next day of the fool who had given him the price he asked; and the transaction would become public property, with the result that the police might get wind of it.

It was safer to waste the time necessary to drive a hard bargain. And so we wrangled until I had fought the amount down to a fair price, when we spent another ten minutes squabbling whether he should give me an old bridle or merely a rope halter.

When I had gained my point and was riding the horse away he swore so violently that he was a heavy loser by the deal, that I knew he had made enough profit to boast about. I thought it best to alter his opinion, therefore.

"Do you know the history of this horse?" I asked knowingly. "No, you can't or you'd know that I've cheated you. Do you know that he came from General Kolwich's stable and was sold for four hundred roubles? I should have paid that for him, had you pressed me. I shall get five for him. But you should learn to know a horse when you see one."

He pushed his cap back and scratched his head, and invoked the name of the Deity in a despair that was almost pathetic.

I rode off with a chuckle. I knew that I had

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struck deep into his pride as a horse trader, and that he would now keep his lips as close as a rat trap about the whole transaction. He would brood over it, and wait for the day when he could get even with me; but though the skies fell, he would never speak of that horse again to anyone.

The bargaining had taken nearly an hour, and I feared the sands of Volna's patience would be running out fast.

She greeted me with a sigh of relief. "I had begun to fear all sorts of things."

"You have never had to buy a horse in these parts. It's an acquired art and can only be accomplished with many lies and much time. But we'll be off now. You can manage to ride bare-back, I hope?"

She smiled. "I have ridden bare-back ever since I was a child.

"Then you haven't had time yet to forget."

"Is that a reflection on my youth or another compliment?"

"It's about the truth, that's all."

"I'm nearly one and twenty," she declared with a delightful air of dignity.

"It is a great age," I agreed. "I remember how I felt at the time. One is never so old again, they say, until quite late in life."

I helped her to mount. "Bare-back riding is a little undignified for one and twenty, I'm afraid. Now we are really off and in our new characters. Do you know who you are?"

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"Miss Margaret Garrett, an English girl who is very troubled what to do with the r's in her name."

"We can alter that. My friend always calls his sister Peg."

"Peg! what a woodeny name."

"Short for Peggy—we think that rather pretty." She repeated it several times and laughed.

"Why do you laugh?"

"You have queer notions of what is pretty."

"Mine's worse, I'm called Bob."

"Bob! Yes, that is much worse. Bob. Bob. Bob. It's very short, and easy; but it's very funny."

"My sister always calls me Bob—every one does, in fact."

"You have a sister then. What is her name?"

"Sylvia."

"Now that is a pretty name."

"Not always. She gets called Silly, sometimes."

"That's monstrous. Is she angry?"

"Not a bit. You see these are really pet names."

"Oh!" She was silent a moment, and then said: "And are we to be Bob and Peggy to one another?"

"I guess so, except when we quarrel. Then it will be Robert and Margaret. But it will only be until to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"When we reach Cracow, you know."

"Shall we get there to-morrow?"

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"We ought to."

"All right—Bob." She said it with a sly little laugh.

"You'll soon get used to it, Peggy. And now I'll get you to carry my heavy coat, and if you'll shake him up we'll trot for a bit. The sooner we've put a mile or two between us and Bratinsk the better."

CHAPTER V.

AT PULTA

WE kept up a fair pace for nearly an hour, the horse moving at a slow, loping canter, with spells of walking for me to recover breath; and in this way we covered six or seven miles, which brought us to the foot of the steep rugged hills that divide Bratinsk from Pulta.

"We've about a mile and a half climb here, then a stretch of a mile or so along the top, and after that a tremendous hill down into Pulta," I told "Peggy," as we pulled up.

"Are you not tired?"

"No. I could cover a lot of ground at that jog trot. I'm pretty tough, you see."

"Ride up the hill and let me walk."

"Not a bit of it. We'll push on as we are, if you don't mind." I had no breath left for talking, so I plodded on in silence. There had been so much to do in the interval since we had left the Devil's Staircase that I seemed to have had no time to think of anything except the pressing affair of the moment. But I had time now, as I strode up the hill; and for the first time I seemed to awake to a recognition of the supreme confidence and unquestioning trust which Volna showed in me.

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The night was very dark; we were miles from everywhere; she knew nothing of me, and had only seen me first some eight or nine hours before; and yet she rode by my side as contentedly as though we had been friends for life, and were just out for a sort of conventional picnic in conventional hours. The pluck of it appealed to me as much as anything.

"You are a wonderful girl, Peggy," I exclaimed involuntarily.

"Peggy? Do you know, I think I begin to like that name. I have been saying it over and over to myself during the ride. But why am I wonderful? I wish I could get used to saying Bob. But I have a sort of something in the throat that seems to jump up and stop me."

"Ah, that's a spasm of the naming tissues. One only has it when a name is fresh. You'll get over that. The best cure is to say it often."

"Is it, Bob? But why am I wonderful?"

"You do this unconventional thing as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world!"

"Do you mean I oughtn't to trust—my brother Bob? You see, I just can't help myself. I had to trust you. Besides, if you knew"—she broke off, and after a pause added a little eagerly—"you understand, don't you?"

"I understand that chance has given me a very delightful sister."

"Why, didn't you begin by keeping my secret from that stationmaster—about Mary Smith. I

felt like—like nothing I ever felt before when he brought you up and said you were English.”

“You tried your best to speak English.”

“It was like—like a glorious dream come true when you looked so grave and answered me in German. I’m not used to having people do kind things for me, except my dear mother. And when we stood outside the station, I—well, I’d have given anything just to have unloaded my whole stock of trouble to you.”

“Poor Peggy!”

“No, not Peggy, she hasn’t any troubles of that sort yet. They are—Bob’s. But it’s poor Volna; and Peggy will soon be Volna again.”

I did not know how to answer this. There was such a touch of sadness in it: so I said nothing.

“May I tell you?” she asked presently.

“Sylvia always tells me hers; so I know how to keep a secret.”

“I told you I had a half-sister and brother, didn’t I?”

“Are they like you at all?”

“No, no. They are both members of this terrible Fraternity—revolutionaries. My father was one and lost his life in the cause. My uncle, Count Peter—he was the brother of my father’s first wife—has always dominated our family: even my poor dear mother.”

“Is she involved with the Fraternity, too?”

“No, and yet yes. She has no sympathy with the movement at all; but my uncle influenced her

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and she has given large sums of money. She is rich, you know, and, if it is found out, the government would be glad to get any pretext for confiscating her fortune. They would throw her into prison, and it would kill her."

"But surely your uncle was not so mad as to leave anything implicating her in existence."

"I wish I could think that. It may be so; but only this morning he warned me that if these papers did not get to Cracow and a raid was made there, things would be found which would place her in danger."

I thought some things about Count Peter which I did not express. "I hope he was exaggerating matters," I said.

"We have not been happy at home because I would never join in any of these miserable conspiracies. My sister Katinka, and Paul too, always upbraided me."

"You put your sister first, I notice."

"She influences Paul. She is very strong willed, and very—very zealous for the 'Fraternity.'"

"I don't think *you* would make a very formidable conspirator, you know."

"It is not that, exactly. I am too much of a coward, I know. But mother's fortune comes to me and—oh, this miserable money; they want it for the cause."

"Phew!" I whistled. "I begin to understand."

"You thought it strange, I expect, that I was so little affected by my uncle's fate; but I——"

"Don't say any more if it worries you," I said when she paused.

"Oh, I must tell you; only—the fact is, I was always afraid of him and he brought me away from home this time, saying only that I was to go on a visit to some friends; but when we were near Bratinsk he told me what the real object was and—and that mother and he had agreed that I was to be married."

"Married!" I exclaimed.

"Married to a man who is high up in the Fraternity, and that I should not go back home until—until that was done."

I thought more things about Count P—— stronger and harsher things too, this time.

"I had not heard that an hour before you saw me at the station."

"No wonder you looked troubled."

"I stayed there hoping to get a train back to Warsaw. I meant to run away. There is another reason, a terrible entanglement, which made me so eager to get back."

"Involving you?"

"Yes, I'll tell you all about it some time. It closely concerns my mother's safety, too."

"What brought your uncle to Bratinsk?"

"Affairs of the Fraternity; to consult with one of the leaders."

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"Well, I won't say all I think of your uncle for having involved you in all this."

"He is dead. Perhaps if he had not been killed he would have listened to me."

"Perhaps!" But I had my own opinion. "You are right. Volna has had her troubles."

"I could not feel so sorry for him as I should, if—if things had been different. I am glad I have told you. It's such a relief to have told some one. And now you know all about me."

"Did you manage to write to your mother from Bratinsk?"

"Yes, just a short note—that all was well with me."

"We must try to keep it so, too. Here we are at the top of the hill. Now we'll push along again: and then, the first train for Cracow."

We soon covered the flat along the top and I pointed out to her the twinkling lights of Pulta below us.

"How quickly we've come," she cried.

"We must have a straight story to tell. I shall say we are driving in from Vashtic—a place on the other side of Pulta—and that our carriage broke down and we had to continue the journey in this fashion. I shall ask whether Mr. Trevor, a tall fair man, was in the train at the time of the wreck. But you'll leave the lies for Bob to tell of course."

"How bluntly you put it."

"Oh, we can't help telling some. But it's in a good cause; so we must hope they'll pass as white ones."

I began to understand that night that artistic lying is really a very difficult accomplishment, when inquisitive officials have to be satisfied.

I found the railway station at Pulta in the hands of the police. It had been taken into custody so to speak. When anything happens in Russian Poland, it immediately becomes an object of suspicion; and any one seeking information is at once suspected of complicity. An officer stopped us and asked in a peremptory manner: "Who are you and what do you want?"

"There has been an accident, I believe."

"Who are you and what do you want? Answer." A little more sharpness in the tone.

"I am an Englishman, Robert Garrett, and this is my sister. We wish to know whether a friend, Mr. James Trevor, of London, has been hurt in the accident!"

"What accident?"

"The accident to the Cracow express!"

"Who told you there had been an accident?"

"I heard it at Vashtic."

"Who told you there had been an accident?" he repeated.

"It seemed to be generally known. The servants in the house where I was staying heard it somewhere?"

"What are the servants' names?"

"I don't know. I think the man who told me was called Paul. But what I want to know——"

"Where were you staying at Vashtic?" he interrupted.

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"What can that matter. Mr. Trevor of London——"

"Ah! You refuse to answer?" He turned away and beckoned to a companion, with whom he conferred, nodding toward us. Then turned to me again. "How did you get here?"

"I started in a caleche but the wheel came off and we had to finish the journey in this fashion."

"Which wheel?"

"The left hind wheel."

"Whose carriage was it?"

"I hired it from Gorlas Malstrom." My inventive faculty for names was getting strained.

"Where does he live?"

"At Vashtic close to the hotel."

"Which hotel?"

"The Imperial." I remembered the name of a place where I once had lunch.

"Are you staying there?"

"I am not going back."

"How long were you there?"

"Not more than an hour or two."

"Where were you before?"

My local geography not being strong enough to stand a fusillade of this kind, I threw up an earth-work of anger.

"Look here, do you want me to give you a history of my tour with all particulars of my hotel bills since I left London?"

"Ah, you refuse to answer," he said again, stolidly regarding me with a gloomy stare of suspicion.

"Oh, no; but I've had enough of your impertinent curiosity. I am an Englishman, let me see your superior officer."

"Go away," he said curtly.

"I demand to see——"

"Go away; or you will be arrested."

Then I had an inspiration. I said, with a show of great indignation: "Very well. I'll go, and what's more I'll go by the first train to Cracow and lay the matter before the British Consul. When is the first train? You'll see whether you can smash up English travellers in your infernal trains and then refuse their friends any information."

This appeared to make an impression. He hesitated, spoke to his companion, and then said: "Come back in the morning. There is no train until eleven o'clock."

I had gained the information I needed; but I kept up my pretence of anger, muttering and grumbling and mumbling about what the British Consul would do, and so on, as I turned the horse's head and moved off.

"Bad luck again," I whispered to Volna. "No train to-night. You may as well try to get a night's rest."

"It's a dark wood that has no clearing," she said cheerily. "You need rest too, I am sure."

We went off to find a hotel: and presently Volna whispered: "One of the men is following us."

"The best thing we can do is to make use of him, then," said I; and I halted to let him come up. It

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was the companion of the man who had questioned me, and I resolved to try a different method with him.

I took out a gold piece and let him see it. "You have been told off to follow me, I suppose?"

He glanced at the money and thought I was going to bribe him. "I have only my duty to do," he said.

"If you'll be guide instead of follower and show me where my sister and I can get rooms, I'll give you this."

He was my man instantly. "There will be no difficulty about that. The accident on the line has filled up the place, but I can manage it for you. You are English?" he said, as we walked.

"I only wanted to see if my poor friend, Trevor, was in that smash. But you heard what passed?"

He shrugged his shoulders and grinned. "You did not ask in the right way;" and he glanced at the money I had given him. "To-morrow it will be all right. There is a train to Cracow at eleven o'clock. I shall be there. No Englishman was hurt in the accident. You may feel quite at ease."

"I am glad to hear that," I said. I was; but not for the reasons he thought.

He earned his gold piece; for he soon found accommodation for us and for the horse; and bade us good-night, repeating his assurances that all would be well in the morning.

CHAPTER VI

VERY SISTERLY

VOLNA was down before me the next morning waiting in a little room where we had had supper.

"I guessed Bob would be tired so I would not have him called," she said. "I have been up an hour or more."

"And Peggy, how is she?"

"Hungry. And breakfast is ready."

"You slept well?"

"When I had stopped thinking. I couldn't help it," she said in answer to my shake of the head. "I was saying my lesson over and over, lest I should forget it. Do you know it?"

"Lesson?"

"All the names you mentioned so glibly last night at the station."

I laughed. "Oh, we shan't need to remember. We shan't have any more bother. That man's hint as to how to ask questions will carry us through. You'll see."

"Well, we must be quick, it's nearly ten o'clock."

"We've half an hour. And we're developing a knack of doing a good deal in half an hour."

"I think I shall be a little afraid of you."

"Why?"

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"You tell them so readily."

"Ah, that's Bob Garrett. Don't worry about him. He won't tell them to you."

"I know that."

"I think that for a pair of dangerous conspirators we keep up our spirits capitally."

"I shouldn't be able to without you. I don't know what I should have done, indeed, nor how to thank you."

"Wouldn't a man be a brute who didn't do his best to look after his sister?"

"You make light of everything."

"Well, you can thank me at about six or seven o'clock this evening. We shall be in Cracow then, and the papers will be out of our hands and off our minds."

"And after that?"

"By Jove. I don't know. I haven't thought about that. One thing at a time and—Cracow first. We must go."

We walked up to the station and found a most welcome change in the attitude of the police. Our friend of the preceding night was looking out for us, and he had evidently let it be known that there were gold pieces to be earned. Everybody received us with smiles. Even the man who had acted the inquisitor's part overnight came up and was almost profuse in his apologies.

He had not known that I was an English milord; my appearance at that time and in such a way had aroused curiosity; duty compelled them all to be

suspicious; there were dangerous people about; I had probably heard of the discovered plot; and so on.

I understood. I took out some gold coins and fingered them carelessly. His eyes lighted with greed as he gazed at them.

"About the accident?" I asked.

"There has been a bad accident; but no one of the name of Trevor, no Englishman at all, was in the train. I have made a special investigation," he added insinuatingly.

"I'm sorry to have given you the trouble; but thank you."

"It is no trouble, only a pleasure to be of some small service to an English milord."

"I am greatly relieved," I said. "You will probably have had to pay some one for the work. Permit me to repay you;" and I gave him a fifty rouble note. His good will was cheap at a five pound note; but he seemed amazed at so generous a tip. His face beamed as he pocketed it.

"Really it is not necessary," he said. "If I can be of any further assistance, pray tell me."

"My sister and I were thinking of going to Cracow," I said indifferently. "Is the line safe, do you think?"

"You still wish to see the British Consul there?" This with just a shade of anxiety.

"Oh, dear no—unless it is to express my high opinion of the courtesy shown me here. Last night is forgotten. I quite understand."

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"The train will start at eleven. It is usual—a mere form of course in your case—to ask for passports when issuing tickets for stations beyond the frontier."

"Here they are;" and I took them out of my pocket book making sure that he should see there was plenty of money in it. "Robert Garrett and Margaret Garrett, my sister."

He just glanced at them and with a bow to Volna, returned them.

"Shall I show you where to get your tickets?" He was making everything delightfully smooth for us.

"I suppose we shall reach Cracow by about four?" I asked casually, as I took out my cigar case.

"Scarcely that, I fear. The traffic is disorganized and the direct line has been closed. You will travel by way of Bratinsk and change there; and then go round by the loop which joins the main line again at Solden."

The ill news was so unexpected that it caught me right off my guard. To go to Bratinsk meant walking right into the hands of the men who were hunting for us.

To cover my sudden confusion, I let my cigar case fall, and as the official stooped to pick it up, I caught Volna's look of dire dismay, and shot her a warning glance.

"You smoke of course," I said to him, and as we

lit our cigars, I was thinking how on earth to get out of the difficulty.

Then Volna gave another proof of her quick-wittedness. "Ought you to smoke just yet, Bob?" she asked in a snappy sisterly tone. "You know what the doctor said about your heart."

I took the cue. "You're always interfering, Peggy," I said, very testily. "I wish you wouldn't."

The police official affected not to hear this little interchange of family amenities and discreetly looked away.

"I only do it for your good," she rapped back, with a great air of superiority. "You complained of that feeling, you know. But please yourself. You always do."

"Rubbish. It's only because you know I want to go and you want to stay." She shrugged her shoulders and turned away.

"If you are going, the time is close," said the official.

"Of course I am going;" and I scowled at Volna and took out some money. "Where do we get the tickets?"

He was turning to show me when I let the coins fall and the cigar drop from my lips as I pressed one hand to my heart—which, by the way, was as sound as a bell—and clutched him with the other for support.

"I knew it by the look about your eyes. I saw

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it coming," said Volna, unsympathetically, as she stooped to pick up the money, and the man helped me to a seat. "You *will* do these things. Please lay him straight down and get him some water, or better, a drop of brandy." She took off my hat and fanned me with her handkerchief. "It's nothing serious," she said to the others who came round. "He'll be better in a moment. Thank you," this to the man who came back with the brandy. "Give him air, please." She was most business-like and sisterly—as though I had been in the habit of fainting daily and she of restoring me.

I came round, of course; but not until the train had left and the question of our return to Bratinsk was settled.

"Perhaps you are satisfied now," I said to Volna most ungraciously, as I sat up.

"How absurd you are, Bob. I didn't give you the cigar."

"When is the next train?" I asked the official.

"Not until to-night."

"There you are," I said to Volna with a brotherly readiness to put all the blame on her. "What now?"

"This gentleman said there was some fine scenery here; and a ride or drive would do you good."

"Scenery!" I cried with a fine contempt. "Well, I suppose we can't sit about the station all day. But do as you please;" and she walked out

of the station. I could have laughed at the excellent affectation of sisterly discontent.

The police official sympathized with me—it was I who had tipped him—and expressed his feeling with a deprecating smile and shrug and a lifting of the brows.

“I suppose it’s the only thing to do,” I murmured as I rose.

“It is perhaps for the best after all that you did not catch the train. There is your baggage,” he said.

“Baggage?”

“Remembering what you said last night about the accident to your carriage on the way from Vashtic, and thinking you might need the baggage in it, I sent out this morning to have it brought here.”

“Did you? That’s really very friendly and obliging,” I managed to answer quite cordially, while wishing him at the devil for his interference.

“What shall we do with it?”

“Oh, just keep it at the station here till I come back for that evening train. You’ll know it easily. Two leather portmanteaus; one marked ‘R. G.’ and one ‘M. G.’ London. I’ll go and tell my sister. She’ll be as delighted as I am at your thoughtfulness. It was only that which made her wish to remain here for the day.”

I went after Volna, who was walking toward the little town.

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"That's a nice thoughtful fellow. He has sent out someone to find our luggage in the broken-down trap and bring it in. I told him how glad you'd be."

"Should I go back and thank him?"

"I don't think it's necessary, you can do that when we get back this evening. We are going for a ride now—and the sooner we're off the better." I went to the stable where my horse was, thinking how to get over the rather awkward difficulty of securing a second animal.

I did not intend to return to Pulta; and if I hired the horse I should not be able to return it. To buy it might create suspicion, as a man does not purchase a horse merely to go for a ride—even in that horse-bartering region; and I had no wish to turn horse-thief.

I put a bold face on the matter and went into the stable whistling. An ostler was grooming my horse and the owner of the place looking on.

"That's a nice looking animal of yours," he said.

"Yes; and as good as he looks."

"No doubt. Andreas knows a good horse."

"Andreas? Who's he?"

"At Bratinsk. Where you got him, I suppose."

I scented danger and fenced. "I suppose you know most of the horses round about here. Will you smoke?" And I gave him a cigar.

"I know this one. I sold him to Andreas."

"Did you? Well, I don't care anything about

Andreas, but I know he's a good horse and I want to hire one as good for my sister to ride to-day."

"I can find you one. There he stands." I had a look at him. A good horse I saw at a glance. "I like his looks," I said.

The ostler took him out and ran him up and down. Then an idea occurred to me, involving some of the white lies of necessity however. I expressed a very exaggerated admiration.

"Carry a lady?"

"Carry a baby," was the reply.

"Then I tell you what I'll do if you'll agree. We're going to Cracow for a couple of days and coming back; and when we come back we shall want two horses. I'll buy him from you if you can find me a couple of saddles, and if we can come to terms for your taking care of both the horses while we stay here."

It did not take very long to conclude the bargain, and Volna and I were soon mounted.

Just as we were starting my friend of the police came up.

"Going for the ride then?" he asked knowingly.

"Oh, yes. By the way, has that luggage of mine come in yet?"

"No. They ought to have been back long before now."

"That's a nuisance. My sister has to do without her habit."

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"She looks very charming," he replied, with a bow.

"What time must we be back for that train?"

"Six o'clock. But why not ride to Solden, it's not more than twenty miles or so. You could take the train there."

"Oh, no. We're going the other way."

"Are you ever coming, Bob?" asked Volna, sharply.

He stepped aside with another significant shrug of the shoulders and with a laugh I rode off.

"You do the vinegary sister to the life," I said.

"There was cause then. I caught sight of that police agent from Bratinsk in the distance."

"By Jove!" I exclaimed; and we clattered off through the narrow streets and as soon as we were clear of the town gave our horses their heads.

CHAPTER VII

THE LUCK TURNS

VOLNA was thoroughly at home in the saddle, and it was easy to see that she had been accustomed to horses all her life. She had a perfect seat; and that firm hand and control which bring out the best there is in a horse and make him understand that the master is up.

It was delightful to watch her; and as we kept at it in that first rattling stretch, I believe that in the sheer exhilaration of the ride, we forgot everything, even the unwelcome appearance of the police agent from Bratinsk.

But neither the pace nor the oblivion could last for ever, and when we drew rein at the foot of a hill we came back to a recollection of the load of our worries.

"Wasn't that glorious?" she cried, her cheeks glowing, and her eyes shining, as she stretched forward and patted her horse's neck.

"You ride magnificently. How you would enjoy a run with the hounds in England!"

"I have read about it. I love horses. I can keep in the saddle all day. I have done it at home." Then her face clouded. "How selfish! I had almost forgotten," she added.

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"We are doing all we can," I replied. "Are you sure that the man you saw was that police agent?"

"Could I forget him?"

"You don't think he saw us?"

"No. He was talking very earnestly to someone. But I recognized him instantly."

"I'd give something to know what brought him to Pulta."

"He was following us, surely."

"We must hope not. If Michel did his work properly, my horse with your uncle's coat will have been found a good many miles on the other side of Bratinsk; and his men should be hunting for us there. But I can't say I like the look of the thing."

"What shall we do?"

"We'd better try and think what he'll do. I had intended to take the hint which the man at Pulta dropped, to ride to Solden, and take the train from there. But if the other man picks up our trail there, he'll set the wires going and we shall find someone waiting for us at Solden."

"How far is it to Cracow? Could we ride all the way? I could ride all day and all night too, if necessary, as long as the horses will last out."

"We don't know the road. I don't even know where we are now. When you saw that man, I just rattled off at hazard. I know Cracow is pretty well west of Pulta, a little bit south too, and I guess we are on the right road. I am accustomed to take long rides and besides having a fairly good bump of

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location, always carry this;" and I showed her a small compass on my watch chain.

"I always ride by the sun, but then I know the country round Warsaw for ever so many miles."

"We should be in a pretty pickle if we were lost," said I.

"The pickle would be much hotter if it was a police preserve."

"By Jove, it would. And the worst of it is that if that fellow hears of us at Pulta, he'll know the names we've taken."

"Poor Bob, I'm getting him into very troubled waters."

"It's not Bob or Peggy I'm thinking of, it's Volna, and Volna's mother. Cracow seems a mighty hard place to reach; but I'm going to get there somehow."

I was silent for a while thinking over the problem. Volna's suggestion was the best if we could do it—to ride all the way to Cracow. But it was no light undertaking. If I had known the way, I should not have hesitated; but the days were short and although the sun was shining brightly enough then, the weather looked as though it were going to change. It was warmer; and when a spell of frost breaks in that country, it generally indicates that rain or snow is coming. To be lost in a rain or snow storm would be a very ugly development indeed.

There was moreover the awkward question whether we were likely to be pursued. On the

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other hand to stop at Solden appeared to be even more risky.

Seeing me thus thoughtful, Volna broke in. "You are not going to keep anything from me, are you. Don't do that, please? Do you think that man is likely to ride after us from Pulta?"

"That was just in my mind. I should say it will depend upon how soon he learns anything about us. He is more likely to trust to the wires."

"It's getting very exciting. He may telegraph ahead and have people sent out to stop us. I suppose I ought not to say so, but I am beginning to feel a sort of keen enjoyment."

"I have made up my mind. We'll stick to the horses and avoid the trains. But we'll try and mislead any one who may follow us."

We had already passed several people on the road. I stopped the next comer.

"Is this the road to Solden?" I asked the man, evidently a farmer.

"Yes, one of them."

"Straight road?"

"As straight as roads are in these parts," he replied, with a grin.

"I mean do I have to turn to the left or right?"

"You'll be turning most of the time. You're from Pulta, aren't you?"

"It's not where I'm from but where I'm going that concerns me."

"All right. I know the lady's horse;" and on he drove without any more.

"Everybody seems to know everybody else's horse about here," I said. "If it weren't awkward it would be comical. We'll ride on and try the next man."

The next was another farmer. A surly Russian who understood Polish with difficulty and spoke it unintelligibly. So I thanked him and rode on no wiser.

Three or four miles later brought us to a village.

"Had we not better get some food here?" asked Volna. "I will go and buy it, and perhaps can find out at the same time what road we ought to take." So we dismounted, and I waited with the horses.

Presently a priest came by, and bade me good-day with a smile.

"You have a picturesque place here, Father," I said. "What is it called?"

"Kervatje," he answered, and we began to talk. I learnt that his name was Father Ambrose, and after some while he asked, "You are a foreigner?"

"An Englishman. My sister is with me. We were going to Solden, but I fear have lost the way."

"Oh, no. Solden lies across the hills there. A rough road but fairly direct. The only point of difficulty is just over the brow of the hill where the road forks. Take that to the right or you will go astray and might find yourselves in Cracow, after some forty miles or so, that is——" and he smiled pleasantly.

"I'll remember what you said," I replied, "and am much obliged to you."

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"It is a pleasure. I have been in England; and speak English a little. But I read much." We then chatted about London and the incidents of his visit until Volna came up.

"My sister," I said. As he greeted her I saw him start and look very closely at her.

"How do you do?" he said in English, to her complete discomfiture, holding out his hand. I read her signals of distress and sailed in to the rescue.

"My sister is unfortunately dumb," I said.

"How sad," he exclaimed, throwing up his hands. Then he looked puzzled. "She bears a remarkable resemblance to a very beautiful woman whom I knew in the long ago. Twenty years and more. She is a Pole, and is now the Countess Drakona. How very strange."

"Yes, these chance likenesses are very extraordinary," I said, gravely. "Come, Peggy, we must get on," I added to Volna, in English, and put her in the saddle again.

"How very sad," he repeated, mournfully. "And yet how clever of her to be able to make herself understood in buying things."

"The education of the dumb in England is almost perfect. Signs are their language, you know," I replied, as I shook hands with him and mounted.

He looked after us very thoughtfully, and when presently I turned, he waved his hand to me and I saw him walk a few paces and then enter the shop where Volna had made her purchases.

"I think we'll rattle on again for a bit. He's going to find out that yours is a singular form of aphasia, and only affects your knowledge of English. Perhaps he'll class it as a case for the scientists; but more likely as one of suspicious ignorance."

"Who can he be?" asked Volna.

"He gave me his name as Father Ambrose."

"I have heard my mother speak of him."

"He spoke of her as a very beautiful woman."

"And she is still beautiful."

"And he said how closely you resembled her."

Volna laughed. "Bob mustn't be conventional. That's a sort of ball-room dandy's speech. And no brother talks like it."

"Brothers don't always say all they think."

"But they keep their thoughts to themselves."

"I know what I think about my sister," said I. She smiled again, and glanced at me. "Don't you think I bought a huge parcel, Bob?"

"If we eat all that, it will last us farther than Cracow. But I know what it means generally, when a girl goes shopping."

"Yes, she thinks of things that are necessary. There are loaves in there for the horses."

"I never thought of them," I admitted.

"One of us must think sensibly," she retorted.

"True for you. But did you find out anything about the road to Solden?"

"No. A woman served me, and she knew nothing."

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"Well, I found out from the priest. At the top of the hill yonder the road forks and that to the left will take us to Cracow, forty miles."

"I wonder what he is thinking now he knows I am no mute."

"Men make all sorts of mistakes, and I shouldn't be in the least surprised if he believes we are just—running away together."

"Bob! How ridiculous!" she cried, with a merry laugh, her cheeks aflush. "Let us get on;" and she shook the reins, and dashed on ahead from me.

When we reached the forked roads at the top of the hill I glanced at my watch. It was nearly half-past three, and we had still forty miles to cover on an unknown road; it had taken us some three hours to do about twenty miles in daylight with the horses fresh—how long would they take to finish the journey mostly in the dark? I shook my head dubiously over the sum.

"We'll ride on a couple of miles or so and then find a spot for our picnic; but we can't spare more than half an hour at the outside."

Black bread, sausage, and village cheese do not make an epicurean lunch; but Volna and I had rich hunger sauce, and were more than satisfied. We fed the horses while we were eating, to save time, and in half an hour we were ready for the road again. There was no longer any doubt that the weather was going to change. As we mounted there were very ominous banks of dark sullen

clouds. Rain or snow would fall within a few hours: but I could only hope it would be rain.

"I fancy we've shaken off any pursuit even if any one started out to follow us," I said.

"We are going to have some weather, too, that will help us. I hope Bob doesn't mind riding in the wet."

"You guessed the thought in my mind, eh?"

"No. I'm used to reading weather signs. The rain never hurts me. I've been out for hours in it. But we shan't have much for an hour or two, you'll find."

"We'd better make the most of our time then."

We rode as fast as we dared push the horses in view of the distance to be covered. I eased my animal up the hills, and now and again took a spell of half a mile or so on foot; but despite this, I was concerned to find that before we had covered another twenty miles he began to show signs of fatigue.

Then the storm burst upon us. It was rain, not snow; but rain in almost tropical force. It would not have been so bad, had we known the road; but we had already had to stop several times to make sure we were going right.

For two hours we plodded through a pelting storm until I was drenched and feared that Volna must be in the same condition.

"I wouldn't care if I could see," she said once. It was pitch dark, and we could only go at a walking pace.

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"I shouldn't care if you were not wet," I answered, "though I confess I'd like to know where we are."

"I am not very wet," she said. "My fur cloak protects me. We shall get somewhere in the end."

"In England we have a civilized habit of putting up sign posts," I grumbled, as we came to another forked road and I was at a loss which to choose. "All the roads seem to be twins in this place."

Which way to choose I could not even guess. I tried to judge which was the better road; but both appeared equally bad.

"Let the horses decide," said Volna.

"Yours is the fresher of the two, and better able to use his instinct.

"Yours is much keener to get to a stable," she laughed.

I walked mine back a little distance and then gave him his head. He walked deliberately to the side of the road, and began to crop the grass.

Volna tried hers then; and he went as far as the fork where he waited for the other to join him. Then they both moved on to the left.

"So be it," said I, and we let them go as they would.

"It's not raining so fast," declared Volna, presently. "Shall we draw up under a tree and give them the rest of the bread?"

"It'll be nice soft food," I laughed.

"I can wring my cloak, too, and ease the weight from my horse a little.

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We pulled up under a tree and gave the horses the bread, munching a crust ourselves, and making the best of things. Volna's pluck was inextinguishable; and she laughed and joked over her plight as she wrung out the wet.

I struck a match and looked at my watch, and was startled to find it was nearly ten o'clock.

I told Volna and we started again. The rain was much less and the darkness had lifted somewhat; but I led my horse now instead of riding.

Presently I felt the road getting suspiciously soft and grassy, and some minutes afterwards I stumbled up against a gate which blocked the way and led into a wood.

There was nothing for it but to go back to the forked road. To make matters worse, the rain started again and came pouring down even more violently than before.

Nor was that the worst. We got off the road again, and once more were brought to a standstill by a gate.

"It looks as though we were lost," I said.

"We've about reached the bottom of our troubles, I should think," replied Volna, still cheery. "But if the chance offered, I should like to put off the rest of the ride till daylight. And look, there's a light." She pointed to it gleefully, away to our left.

We made our way to it with trouble, and found that it came from the lower window of a small house.

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I rapped at the door; and the light was instantly extinguished.

I had to knock again twice, and then a window above was opened, and a woman put her head out.

"Who are you, and what do you want? Are you the police?"

"Police? No. We have lost our way, and want shelter."

"There's no one in the house but me. How many are you?"

"Two. Myself and my sister. We can pay you well."

She drew her head in for a minute, and then looked out again and said. "Are you sure you're only two? Let's see you." We stood back that she could do so. "I'll come down," she said.

When she opened the door the light she held revealed to me one of the most forbidding faces I have ever seen on a woman's shoulders.

"You've got horses, have you? You must stall them in the shed."

She handed me a lantern, and Volna came with me. When we had fumbled our way to the shed, and tied the horses up, giving them some hay we found in the place, we went back to the house.

She admitted us without more delay and as soon as we were inside, locked and bolted the door. "A lone woman needs to be careful," she said in explanation, as she led us into a room at the side where a fire was burning.

Two glasses and a spirit bottle were on the table,

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and a smell of rank tobacco smoke hung about the place.

Volna went in first, and the woman, having placed the light upon the table, stood holding the door for us to pass.

"We are much obliged to you," I said, and as I turned to her I caught sight of a man's face peering through the half closed door of a dark room across the passage.

"I'll do my best for you," she answered. "Dry yourselves by the fire. I'll be back in a moment." With that she went out, and I heard her turn the key softly upon us.

It might mean nothing; but—well, I did not tell Volna.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE COTTAGE

VOLNA walked up to the wood fire, took off her fur turban, shook it, and laughed.

"Were you ever as wet before? I never was."

"I wonder if the woman can find you something to put on while the clothes are dried. What do you make of her?"

"She about fits the place," she replied, glancing round the room.

A wooden bench, a couple of wooden armchairs, a square table and a black oak chest of drawers with some unpainted shelving over it for crockery, pots, and pans, constituted the furniture; and for decoration a couple of crude coloured prints, scriptural in subject and grimy with age, hung over the fireplace with a piece of broken looking glass on a string between them.

"Rough," I said, in answer to her look.

"It might be dirtier. It is always a good sign when a woman's care can be traced."

"She said she was a lone woman, so she can't have much else to do except look after the place."

Volna smiled. "Didn't you see those?" and she pointed to a pair of men's boots by the chest of drawers. "Probably wood cutter or charcoal

burner or something of that sort; often very honest people."

I thought of the man's face I had seen and said nothing.

"Have you your flask?" I took it out. "Good, then I shall warm some water and you must have a hot drink;" and in a minute she had cleaned a small saucepan and had the water on the fire.

"I wish the woman would come back," I grumbled. "I want you to get your wet clothes off."

"I shouldn't call her," replied Volna.

"Why not?"

"I shouldn't let her know that we know she locked the door."

"Did you notice that?"

"That's deliciously man-like, Bob. Of course we're in a very queer place; but we may as well pretend we see nothing odd and suspect nothing. We're not really blind, however."

"I begin to think Peggy's more wonderful than ever," said I with a chuckle.

The woman came in then with a bundle of clothes on her arm; and her manner was very different. She was a hideous creature truly; the upper part of her face seamed with what might have been two knife slashes, and one cheek quite disfigured with marks like those which vitriol leaves. When she spoke or smiled her mouth drew up to the side, disclosing long yellow fangs of teeth.

"Ah, that's right; a hot drink you're making. You're both wet to the skin, aren't you? I've

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rummaged up some clothes for you. I'll make you as comfortable as I can; but I'm only a poor woman——"

"You're a very kind one," said Volna, looking at the clothes she had brought.

"They are only rough, you know; but the best I can manage."

"Water's hot, Bob," cried Volna. "Get me a cloth to wipe these glasses," she said to the woman; and the moment her back was turned Volna slipped the papers from her dress and handed them to me. We mixed some brandy and water and I insisted upon her drinking some.

"I've set a candle in the room opposite for you," said the woman.

"Call me when you're ready, Peggy;" and I went off with the clothes she had brought for me.

I had just completed the change when I heard a stealthy step in the passage. I was listening for it, indeed, and had not shut the door. Some one tried to shut it for me. I stopped that and pulled it wide open. It was the man whose face I had seen before—long, thin, cadaverous and cunning, with close set, ferrety eyes.

"Come in," I said, cheerfully.

He started very uneasily and then mumbled: "I thought you didn't know it was open."

"All right. I suppose these are your things. I'm much obliged to you."

"They're my best," he answered. "You're welcome."

Now he was some four inches shorter than I, whereas the clothes were quite long enough for me; and the discrepancy did not escape me, nor tend to lessen my suspicions.

He stood watching me silently as I finished the change and took out the contents of my pockets. But I was careful not to let him see that I had a weapon.

In the silence I could hear the rain streaming down.

"It's a fearful night," I said; "your wife said you weren't at home."

"Just come in."

"You managed to keep dry."

He pretended not to hear me. "It won't last much longer. How did you come here?"

"We got off the road in the dark and saw a light in your window."

"Strangers here, maybe?" I caught a quick furtive glance with a gleam of considerable interest in the shifty eyes.

"I don't think I've ever been in this particular spot before; but I shall know better when I see it by daylight. Anybody can get lost in the dark."

"Going far?"

"Out for a ride and got caught in the storm. Will you see to the horses for me?"

"I have. Couple of good ones. One of them is nearly done up. You've come far?"

At that moment Volna opened the door of the

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other room and called me. She burst into a merry laugh at the sight of me and I grinned back at her.

"You look as if you were made up as a peasant for theatricals," I said.

"I don't know what you're like. But I'm dry. Think of it, Bob, dry once more."

I carried in my wet things and they were soon steaming by the fire with hers. The woman hustled about and put some black bread and vile cheese on the table; while the man stood fidgetting about sheepishly by the door.

"It's all I've got to eat; but I can make you some coffee."

"The very thing," said Volna.

"Fetch the coffee, Ivan," said the woman. The man hesitated, glanced at her, and then shuffled away.

"Come on, Bob, I'm famished," cried Volna, sitting down and cutting some bread.

"Ivan says your horse is done up," said the woman. "You must be a long way from home."

"Further than you think," replied Volna. "We're English."

"You didn't ride from England?" she asked stupidly.

"You dear soul, there's the sea between England and here."

"But you're strangers?"

"Some more bread, Bob?" and as she bent down to cut it she whispered in French to me: "She's

asked that question a dozen times, trying to pump me all the time."

"Strangers?" I said to the woman. "Of course we are. Tourists. Don't know a soul for many a mile about here and not a soul knows us. But you needn't be afraid. We can pay you;" and I took out a handful of money and tossed a gold piece across to her.

It was worth the money to see the greedy avaricious light that leapt in her eyes. But Volna looked puzzled and a little alarmed at this act of mine.

"What a time that man is getting the coffee," the woman said. "I suppose he can't find it;" and she went out of the room.

"Why did you do that?" asked Volna.

"Why not? It was the answer she wanted, and it's quite a relief to be able to tell the truth."

"Do you suspect anything?"

"I think the man is a long time finding such a thing as coffee and I wonder they don't keep it here with the rest of their eatables;" and Volna shewed that she understood me.

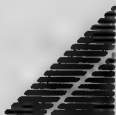
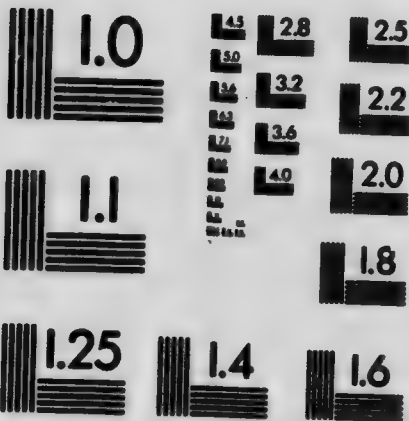
The two came back wrangling: she scolding him for his delay; he protesting he didn't know where she kept things. They were clumsy actors, however.

The woman made some coffee then and set it on the table. "I'm thinking where I'll put you to sleep," she said. "You can have our bed and welcome," she added to Volna; "but for your brother, I'll have to make one up somehow. You



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see we're only poor folks. But we'll manage. Come, Ivan."

I was stirring my coffee and put it to my lips as they went out; and the woman turned and saw me. This time instead of locking the door upon us, they left it ajar.

It was becoming as plain as print.

I set down the cup, untasted, of course, and talked in a fairly loud tone about the kindness of the two and how good the coffee tasted; and Volna taking her cue from me agreed.

Then we all but emptied the two cups into a jug and hid it away, and went on talking unconcernedly. Presently I stole to the door and listened. The two were in the upper part of the house.

Volna, I could see now, was beginning to grow nervous.

"It's all right. We can act much better than they, and there isn't a thing to fear."

Her brow wrinkled. "I think Peggy doesn't want to be left alone, Bob," she said.

"You'll have to make shift with that wooden settle; but you may go to sleep without a thought."

"What do you think they mean to do?"

"They've half done what they meant and we shall soon know the rest. The coffee is drugged of course, and they think we've drunk it. Now, lie down and just go off to sleep. I've dried my last three cigars and am going to smoke one of them."

I settled her on the wooden bench and having lighted my cigar, rummaged about and found an

oily rag with which I cleaned my revolver very carefully, reloaded it and kept it at hand.

I then sat down by the fire smoking and thinking and waiting. It was evident enough that we had got into the hands of some very ugly customers. I recalled several strange tales of dark deeds done in these wild and lonely parts of the country; and the circumstances now lent themselves readily to villainy.

They had got from us the fact that we were strangers, and I had purposely made no hesitation in shewing that we had plenty of money. That they had tried in their clumsy way to drug us, I had no doubt whatever; and the only question was what they meant to do next.

The fear in the woman's first question whether we were the police, and her statement that the man was not in the house, gave a clue to their character; and the change in manner, the assumption of friendliness, the suggestiveness of sending the man to find the coffee; indeed all these circumstances fitted together too well to leave any doubt that some devilment was on foot.

I did not feel the least alarmed, however. I felt myself more than a match for the two in any rough and tumble that was to come; I was thoroughly on my guard; and had a weapon and knew well enough how to use it. As a matter of fact it was we rather than they who were laying the snare.

Somewhere between half an hour and an hour passed without a sound in the house. I had finished

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my cigar and tossed it away and was gazing into the flickering embers of the fire, when I heard the stairs creak slightly. A glance shewed me that Volna was asleep; a tribute this, indeed, to her trust in me.

I dropped my head as though I, too, were asleep and breathed heavily. I was very curious to know what was to happen.

In a short while the door was pushed open noiselessly and the woman put her head in. I had already set her down for the head of the firm, as the more courageous of the pair of rascals.

She looked at us both for some moments and then entered and crept towards Volna. Not daring to let her go too near, I shifted my position and grunted, as if uneasy in my sleep. This drew her attention to me, as I intended, and she stopped and stared at me.

Next she moved to the table and took up the two cups one after another; glanced from them to us in turn; and concluding that we had drunk the contents, set them down with a slight grunt of satisfaction.

The logs slipped in the fire at that moment with a shower of sparks. She started and took a quick step towards the door.

Thinking she was going I moved, breathed very heavily and blinked at her as though almost overcome with sleep.

"I came for the light," she said in a low voice.
"Our candle's out."

For answer I nodded, waved my hand clumsily to signify she could take it, attempted to rise and fell back in my chair, huddled together as if completely overcome with stupor.

She stood with the lamp in her hand as if planning what to do next; a look of diabolical evil on her hideous face. Then slowly and cautiously she came towards me. Having satisfied myself that she had no knife or weapon I shut my eyes and let her hold the light close to my face. I could feel her breath as she bent forward to listen to my breathing.

After a moment she moved away and crossed to Volna, whom she examined with the same scrutiny. A low sigh of satisfaction escaped her, as she turned away and went out of the room, carrying the lamp with her. I heard the stairs creak as she crept up them.

Then I woke Volna. "Don't be frightened. Pretend to be asleep. Something is going to happen; the woman has been in to make sure that we are asleep; and will no doubt be back in a moment."

I went back to my chair and waited, ready to resume my extremely uncomfortable position at a moment's notice.

Shortly afterwards the stairs creaked again, more noisily this time; probably under the heavier weight of them both; but instead of entering the room the steps went along the passage. Then I heard sounds in the distance; just muffled confused noises of knocking and stamping. What caused them I could not conjecture.

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Soon after they had ceased, the footsteps came again into the passage, and a moving streak of light shewed through the door of our room. This time something weighty was set down with a heavy bump just outside the door; a most unaccountable rustling followed; and then the two whispered together. In the pause a pungent odour of paraffin came from the lamp they had.

All sorts of weird conjectures crowded into my thoughts as to the possible meaning of this development. Volna had heard it all and looked at me in bewilderment. I motioned her to keep silence.

Another journey was made up the creaky staircase. It was the man who went, and while he was away the woman looked in upon us. I saw to my surprise this time that she wore her bonnet.

As the man's tread was on the stairs again she drew back and in a whisper loud enough to reach us, she said: "It's all right, you coward. They're both off fast enough. You can do it safely now. The man first, mind."

The next moment the door was pushed wide open and they both entered stealthily.

CHAPTER IX

A VERY TIGHT CORNER

THE suspense of the two or three moments which followed the entrance of the pair constituted an ordeal not to be forgotten. That Volna mastered herself sufficiently to pass through it without a sign or sound, was the greatest proof of her courage she could have given.

It was less trying for me. I had witnessed the woman's former visit, and, despite her ominous whisper to her husband, had come to the conclusion that no attempt was to be made on our lives. Moreover I was armed. But Volna knew nothing of this. I had only been able to whisper a hurried and very indefinite warning to her, calculated, despite my assurance, to work up her fears to a high strain.

They stood still for some moments; the man slightly in front of his wife, who set a candle she was carrying down behind her. The faces of both then caught the red gleam from the embers of the fire; and so evil looking a couple I hope never to see again.

The man's long, thin, cunning face was strained and intense, and his narrow treacherous eyes glanced from me to Volna and back from Volna to me, as if in doubt which to attack first. Just behind him stood the tall, gaunt, and angular form of the

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woman inciting him; her eyes gleaming with excitement, her lips parted and drawn in a snarl to one side, and every line, cicatrice and seam of her scarred repulsive features brought into strong relief by the ruddy gleam of the log fire. She looked a veritable hag of evil, utterly detestable, deadly, and loathsome.

"The man first," she whispered, jogging her accomplice.

He glanced half round to her, irritable, and then I saw that he was carrying a length of cord.

He began to creep slowly toward me until Volna, as she confessed afterwards, could endure it no longer. She sprang up and called me.

In another moment I was on my feet; and before the two could recover from their astonishment, I sprang past them, slammed the door, and set my back against it, my hand on my revolver.

"Now perhaps you'll tell me what this means?"

The woman was for fighting and stood at bay like a beast, just robbed of its intended victim. But the man was of poorer stuff, and cowered ashen white and speechless.

"Mayn't we move about our own house?" asked the woman. "Ivan, if you're a man, you won't stand this."

But Ivan had no sort of fight in him. He clapped his hands to his face and sank into my chair by the fire. The hag looked his way and swore at him with a snarl of contempt.

"Come now, what does this mean?"

"It means that if you don't like it, you can clear out, the pair of you;" and she turned fiercely on Volna. "Coming here with your lies about being lost, and wanting to rob poor and honest folk, and then trumping up a lying accusation. Who are you, I'd like to know."

Her assurance was as brazen as her courage was unquestionable; I own I was at a loss what to do.

"That won't do with me. Your one chance is to tell the truth," I said.

"You're a man, aren't you, to call a woman a liar? Do you hear that, Ivan?" and she went to him and shook him. "Get up, pig: don't sit shaking there when you hear me abused by this thief of the night." She hauled him to his feet; and Volna took the opportunity of crossing to my side.

"You mustn't talk like that here," he said with a sort of hang-dog manner.

"I'd rather talk to you than to the woman there. Now you——"

"You hear that, Ivan. Strike him for that. You deal with him and I'll look after the wench." She pushed him toward me and seemed for the moment to infect him with some of her own desperate courage.

"If you don't like it, go," he said.

"No, they shan't go now," interrupted the fury.

"We daren't let them go now, you fool. You know. Go on."

He still hung back, however, and then she sud-

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denly wrenched open a drawer and took out a formidable looking chopper.

"Here, Ivan, now will you do it? Down with the man and leave the wench to me. It will be death if we don't do it and get away."

The remnants of his courage awoke when he felt the weapon in his hand; and I heard Volna catch her breath at the look which gradually stole into his beady, cruel eyes, as he looked at me.

Goaded by the woman's taunts and the fear-thoughts which her words had started, he took a couple of stealthy steps toward me while the woman went round the table to reach Volna.

Just as he was raising his weapon to rush at me, I whipped my revolver out and covered him.

"Drop that; you murderous devil," I cried, in a ringing tone.

With a cry of fear he started back and let the chopper fall on the brick floor. In a moment I had possession of it, and handed my pistol to Volna.

"If she moves, use it," I said.

But the sudden turning of the tables had knocked the fight even out of the virago of a woman. The man no longer counted. He stumbled back and cowered against the wall, getting as far away from me as possible, and just stared at me beside himself with fright.

"Now we can talk," I said.

"We didn't mean anything," declared the woman. "We were only trying to frighten you

so that we might get safely out of the room. I'm sure I tried to do all I could for you; giving you food and——"

"That'll do. Go to that end of the room." She obeyed me. "Now answer my questions. Why did you come stealing into the room just now—before this time?"

"I only wanted to see you were all right and to fetch the lamp. I've done my best for you," she murmured in a whining, canting, fawning tone.

"You won't answer, eh? Well, I'll give your man a chance. Now you, tell me what was that rope for that you brought in?"

The woman tried to reply, but I silenced her. The man glared at me speechless and helpless.

"Your only chance is to tell the truth. You were going to tie me up with it? Confess."

"No, no, no," he gasped through his pallid lips.

"You had two ropes; one for me and one for my sister here."

"No, no, no," he repeated.

"You know I speak the truth. But if you won't confess that, tell me why you drugged that coffee you gave me."

The woman broke out again declaring by all the saints that I must be mad to ask such a question. The man only gazed stupidly at me in silence.

"Let him drink it then," said Volna; and the woman's start at the shrewd suggestion told me that it had struck home.

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"Yes, that's the test," I agreed readily. "Will you get that jug?"

Volna took out the jug and poured the coffee back into the cups.

They both watched her intently as she did this, turning now and then from her to me, with swift glances of speculative fear.

"Now if this is not drugged or poisoned, drink it;" and I took one of the cups and held it toward the man; "Quick," I cried, so sternly that he trembled. His eyes were everywhere except on my face, and his lips moved convulsively.

"Drink it, fool," said the woman with a sneer.

He stretched out his hand toward the cup, and then with a swift gesture struck at it and dashed it to the ground.

"I knew it. I need no more proof," I declared.

"I'll drink it," cried the woman, making a snatch at the cup on the table. But I caught her hand, and Volna took away the cup.

"No, no, that is for the police," I said.

At the mention of the police an angry oath leapt from her lips and she strove desperately to wrench her hand from my grip to get the cup. I had to use some violence to thrust her back.

Foiled in the effort to destroy the traces of the drug, her rage completely mastered her; and being unable to vent it upon us, she turned upon the man. With a running accompaniment of abuse and reproaches as the cause of the trouble she seized him and shook him till his teeth rattled like castanets,

and then clouted and kicked him and tore at him with her nails like a fiend incarnate until he fell huddled up on the floor howling to her to stop.

Volna opened the door and went out to escape the din and repulsive sight and then called me hurriedly.

In a moment the whole infernal scheme of the two was made clear. The heavy burden which we had heard set down outside the door and which had so puzzled me was explained, as well as the mysterious rustling which had set me wondering.

The one was a cask half full of petroleum; the other a huge heap of shavings, chips and hay, ready saturated with petroleum.

"They meant to bind us in our sleep and fire the house. I did not think there could be such fiends," said Volna, trembling.

It was too obvious to question. The heap of shavings laid ready for lighting told its own story; and with the petroleum thrown into the room where we were to have been left bound and unconscious, nothing could have saved us.

Volna clung to my arm faint and cold with the horror of it. "Let us go," she whispered.

"That is why the woman was dressed to go out. I see it now. That fear of hers of the police, the noise we heard outside; they were expecting the police and meant to fly on our horses. Such devils ought not to be allowed to escape."

But it was obvious that we dared not run the risk of denouncing them.

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"Let us go," said Volna again. "The very air of the place makes me faint and ill."

I went back into the room.

"I have found out all your infernal scheme. Get out of here, and keep out of sight, lest I take the law in my own hands;" and I drew the revolver again to emphasize my words.

The man was seemingly afraid to move; so I dragged him to his feet, hauled him to the door and flung him down in the passage. "Upstairs with you and if I catch so much as a glimpse of you I'll shoot you like the murderous skunk you are."

He crawled away from my feet and slunk up the creaking staircase shaking in every limb and casting frightened glances behind him.

"What are you going to do?" asked the woman, coming to the door.

"Hold your tongue," I thundered. "Go to the villain you egged on to do this thing. Quick, or——" She was scared by my rage and went without another word.

"Shall I change?" asked Volna.

I nodded. "And bring me my things. I'll stop on guard here."

I heard the two muttering and wrangling in the room above; but neither made any attempt to come down; and in some few minutes we were ready.

"We'll go together and get the horses," I said to Volna; and was in the act of opening the door

when I started involuntarily as some one beat a loud peremptory summons on the panel.

"Open the door there, open," called a voice.

Volna started and clutched my arm. "What shall we do?"

If it was the police, we were caught like rats in a trap.

"We must brazen it out," I said.

"The papers?" she whispered. The knocking was repeated more loudly and insistently than before. "Open there, at once. I say."

"See if there's fire enough to burn them."

She ran back into the room.

"Who is there?" I called.

"The police. Open or we shall break in."

To shew hesitation would be fatal. So I unfastened the door and threw it open.

At that moment, Volna came back and shook her head.

Two men entered. "You are our prisoners," cried the first comer. "If you resist the consequences will be on your heads."

"We don't resist. I'm glad you've come."

They seized and held us both; the man who took me snatching the revolver which was still in my hand.

"Ah, a police weapon," he said, significantly, and shewed it to his companion, who appeared to be in command.

"Search them both for any more weapons," came the order, sharp and ringing.

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"Wait a moment. There is a mistake here," I said.

"You've made it then, in letting us net you here so easily;" and they both laughed.

"What is the charge against us?" I asked.

It was about as tight a corner as fate in an ill-natured mood could have devised for us.

CHAPTER X

THE HAG TO THE RESCUE

I KNEW enough of the methods of the police not to lay too much emphasis at the outset upon the fact that they had blundered. The police are pretty much the same all the world over. Charge them with blundering, and they will exhaust every resource to disprove the charge; and in the meantime, you who have made it are getting badly squeezed.

Moreover, I was not certain that it was a blunder. I hoped they were after the villainous couple who lived in the house, and that in the haste and confusion of the moment we had been mistaken for them. But it was quite possible Volna and I had been tracked, and were really the prisoners they sought.

In any case it was highly dangerous for us to be in their hands, and we should need to keep cool heads to get out again, without the fact becoming known that we were fugitives.

As it was, only an accident prevented the incriminating papers from being immediately found. Just the luck that I had told Volna to try and burn them and had not taken them back from her. The search to which she was subjected was little more

than formal; but my pockets were all overhauled, and my papers taken out and examined.

I was not so foolish as to resist; but I began to feel pretty indignant when papers, money, and all, were retained by the leader.

"How did you get this?" he asked, holding up the police revolver. He appeared to attach great importance to my possession of it. This interested me greatly. That I had taken it from the police agent on the Devil's Staircase would certainly be known; and if he was in search of us, it was a sufficient proof that we were the persons wanted. I had to get at that indirectly.

"If you will permit me I will give you an exact report of what has happened here, and that will account for everything."

"All I want is a plain answer to my question. No long roundabout, lying story."

There was no help for it. I must lie. So I did it boldly. "Most fortunately I got the revolver here," I said.

"You're a cool hand," was the sneering reply. "But it won't do you any good to lie to me."

"Fortunately, I mean, because it saved my life and that of my sister here. We were attacked——"

"Do you mean there are any others in the house?" he broke in.

"Certainly I do. The two wretches who appear to have been living here are in a room above."

Both the man and his wife had kept as quiet as

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mutes all this time. But they had evidently been listening, for at that moment the door above was opened, and the two came out.

"Is that the police? Is that the police?" cried the woman. "Heaven, and the blessed Virgin above be praised. We've been nearly murdered by the two villains there. You'll protect us now, won't you? Praise to the Holy Saints for having sent you to our assistance."

"What's all this?"

The couple came running down the stairs and threw themselves on their knees; the woman pouring out a voluble account of how they had been attacked by us and their lives threatened, mingled with thanks for their deliverance, entreaties to protect them, and an urgent warning to pay special attention to me as a dangerous and murderous villain.

I foresaw a very awkward complication. When two parties accuse each other, the police rule is to arrest both.

The leader was obviously perplexed. "What is your name?" he said to me; and before I could reply the woman burst in.

"Ivan Krempel, and that's . . . a, his wife," she cried. "They've been using the house for days and days past."

I attempted to deny this; but he silenced me. "And your names," he asked the woman.

"This is my husband, Peter Vranowski, the woodcutter; I am Anna his wife. We came last

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week from Potzden in Silesia, and have been lodging here with these Krempels. We thought they were honest folks like ourselves."

"You are the man I am searching for," he said, turning to me. "Ivan Krempel, and his wife, Nita."

This was good news in a way. He was not after the Garretts, and I could safely use that name.

"I can understand your perplexity," I said calmly. "But this woman is lying. We are English; Robert Garrett and Margaret Garrett, brother and sister. Caught by the storm to-night, we came here for shelter, and narrowly escaped death at the hands of these two."

"But these people say you are the Krempels."

"So they are. So they are. The holy Virgin knows I speak the truth," protested the old hag.

"The proof is in your hands. Our passports are among the papers which you have taken from me."

"Go into the room there, all of you," he answered, after a pause. I led the way with Volna and the rest followed. "Get a light," he said to Volna, the candle having been extinguished in the former scrimmage.

"I don't know where to look for one. There was a lamp here, but the woman took it away."

"Listen to her. Listen to her. Oh, the liar, when she carried it upstairs with her own hands," cried the hag.

"Go upstairs and see if it's there," he told his man, who went and returned carrying it.

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"The woman was right in that," said the officer significantly.

"She would very naturally know where she herself took it," I exclaimed; but he was as pig-headed as his class, and repeated his statements, adding to my concern, "I don't see how I can decide this. It's beyond me."

"There are my papers," I reminded him. "But surely you have only to look at that man and his wife, and contrast them with my sister and myself to see the difference. You must have some description of them."

He mumbled to himself and began to finger my papers. "I don't see anything here to guide me."

"Those are the passports;" and I pointed to them.

He unfolded them. "I don't read English," he said.

"You can read the names at any rate and, of course, as a responsible official so near the frontier you know a passport by sight."

"He stole that from an Englishman. He boasted of it to us," interjected the woman, who had been watching closely.

"How am I to know this is yours?" he asked immediately, taking the cue suggested.

"There are twenty proofs in those papers, that I am an Englishman; as well as on myself. See, the pocket book there has the address of a London maker. Here, the tab on my coat has my tailor's

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name in London. Don't you hear that I speak with a foreign accent?"

He examined the pocket book, and the tab on my coat; and appeared to be impressed. "They seem right; but you may have stolen them," he said grudgingly.

I pressed the advantage. Picking out a couple of Sylvia's letters I shewed him they were in English, and addressed to me.

"That is not Robert—that is B-o-b," he said suspiciously.

"Robert in England is shortened into Bob," I explained; but he shook his head.

"Here is one on the same paper, Wyrley Court, Great Malverton. It is from my mother, 'My dear son Robert.' You can read that?" and I stuck at him until I had deepened the impression. Then I told him briefly what had happened in the cottage, pointed to the heap of soaked shavings, the two ropes and a cask of petroleum.

This was not done without many interruptions from the woman, who vociferously denied the whole story.

"You say you were to be drugged? How do you know?" I told him of the attempt to make the man drink a cup of the coffee. This appealed to him; and he smiled grimly.

"Have you still the cup you saved?"

Volna got it and handed it to him.

"The woman shall drink it now," he declared. But the old hag swore that it was we who had made

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the coffee, not she; and that we had tried to rob her.

"Why should we wish to rob a woodcutter," I asked. I had his ear now and he began to have a glimmer of reason. "Besides, our horses are outside in the shed."

"They are our horses," asserted the woman.

"Go and look at them. See if a woodcutter, just a week here from Silesia, as she says, would possess two such animals and saddles. One is a side saddle, too."

He sent his man out; and sat silent. Matters were going better, so I left him to absorb the points I had made.

"Will you drink that coffee?" he asked the woman suddenly, very sternly.

"Why should I drink the poison we refused before?" she cried, and pointing her scraggy finger at Volna added: "She made it, let her drink it."

"You see," I said; and he nodded in agreement.

Then his man came back and reported that the horses were two good ones and that the saddles were soaked as if they had been exposed to the fury of the storm; thus bearing out my story.

But at that point I made a serious blunder. As he turned to listen to his man's report I picked up the passports. He saw me, and snatched at the rest of the papers.

"You mustn't touch those," he said angrily. "Return me those two you have taken."

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Instead, I put them back in my pocket. "They are our passports," I answered; "I am an Englishman, and have a right to retain them."

"Give them to me," he repeated.

"They are necessary to me, and I must keep them. I am doing no more than is my right."

Just then his man bent, and whispered in his ear. "I had forgotten," he said. "My man here reads English well. Let him see them."

"They have already been examined, and I must keep them."

"We shall see," he exclaimed very angrily. With that he gave the rest of the papers to the man who went through them carefully.

"I am inclined to believe your story, but your conduct is in some ways very suspicious. Will you return me those papers?"

"No. I have shown them. That is enough."

Then the man drew his attention to a paper.

"Ah! What do you say your name is?"

"Robert Garrett, an Englishman."

"Then who is Robert Anstruther?"

In a moment my heart fell. I knew what was coming?

"I don't understand you."

"Here is a letter of credit for a large sum of money, the name on it is Robert Anstruther. Explain your possession of it."

I tried to affect indifference. "Oh, that!" I exclaimed. "Robert Anstruther is my cousin, and I am taking it to him to Cracow."

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But he didn't believe me.

"You say you are English, and this lady your sister?"

"You have seen our passports proving that."

"Now you can speak to her," he said to his man. I saw the scheme of course, instantly.

"You are Miss Garrett?" the man asked in excellent English.

Lies, like curses, have a nasty habit of coming home to roost; and for the moment I was at the end of my wits. The game was nearly up.

"Yes," said Volna, very nervously.

"My superior doubts that you are English; just tell me anything you please that I may hear you speak English!"

"Don't bother with him, Peggy," I declared in English, putting up a last bluff of indignation. "I'm not going to have my sister bullied. Put your questions to me."

"It is a very simple test."

"Hang your simple tests. We've had more than enough of your tomfoolery."

"You refuse to speak?" he asked her again.

"Yes. At all events I refuse to allow you or any one else to browbeat her. We have nearly lost our lives here; and now, when she is all to pieces, you not only take us for a couple of murderous ruffians and want to arrest us, but you try this sort of infernal nonsense."

I left him in no doubt that I was English, and voluble enough, too. He shrugged his shoulders,

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and told his chief the result of the test; and they whispered together.

"You are Robert Garrett of Wyrley Hall, Great Malverton?" he asked me then in English.

"I've told you who I am."

"Then how is it that Robert Anstruther in the letter of credit, is described as of that address?"

"Can't one relative live with another?" I laughed.

"Permit me to see the address on the passport."

"There is none. You ought to know that;" and with a scoff I unfolded it and shewed him.

"I don't mean there. I mean on the outside, where the name and address are both written."

"I am going to be baited no longer," I rattled back sharply, and was putting the papers away again when he snatched them from me. A glance was enough to prove the inconsistency of my statement; and he reported this to his chief, who put my papers away and rose.

"We shall take you all four to the police office at Schirmskad," he decided.

I had not the least intention of letting him do anything of the kind; but my unwillingness was as smoke to fire compared with that of the woman and her husband. She broke out into a violent tirade swearing she was innocent and would not go.

"Resist at your peril," cried the chief in a loud ringing tone; and he and his man drew their revolvers.

There was a moment of dead silence. My eyes

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were on the chief, and I saw a shadow of perplexity cloud his face. I read it to mean that he had his doubts how to get us all four away if we resisted.

It was a queer turn of the wheel that Volna and I should have to make common cause with the wretches who had attempted our lives. I did not wish them to escape; but our own escape was much more to us than their capture at that moment; and like the chief I was thinking intently what to do.

Glancing round the room his eye fell on the two ropes.

"Hand me those cords," he said to me, curtly.

"I am no police agent," I shot back.

"I call on you to help me."

"You forget; you have arrested me. You must do your own work."

The old hag's eyes were on us as she drank in every word; and she nudged her husband and whispered to him.

"Don't you mean to charge them with attempting your lives?" asked the chief.

"You have arrested me," I returned, shortly.

"Tie those two together," he said, turning to his assistant.

To get the cords the man had either to pass the woman or drive her before him to the end of the room. He tried the latter course and pushed her violently. She fell to the ground, and, letting out a yell shrill enough to wake a cataleptic, clasped his legs, and pulled him down; and in a moment, a

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noisy rough and tumble scuffle was set going between the three.

The chief ran to help his man, and I took advantage of the moment to open the door and put Volna outside.

"Stop there," cried the chief, holding me up with his levelled revolver.

"I am merely putting my sister out of the way of trouble."

"Move an inch and I shall fire," he shouted.

But the words scarcely passed his lips before he came staggering wildly toward me; his arms went up and his pistol was fired in the air. The woman had in some way extricated herself from the struggle on the floor, and his back being turned to her as she rose, she pushed him violently toward me. I caught him and helped myself to his revolver.

We were struggling together when the woman, who had seized hold of the lamp, passed us and dashed it violently into the heap of saturated hay and shavings.

The effect was instantaneous. A blinding flare of flame burst out, almost like an explosion, and a volume of pungent suffocating smoke filled the place.

Volna, quick-witted as ever, wrenched the door open, and I staggered out after her into the night, dragging the chief with me.

CHAPTER XI

FATHER AMBROSE

THE pendulum of luck had swung over again to our side and I lost no time in taking advantage of it. I pushed the man away from me at random, and chanced to send him staggering up against the two police horses which were tied up close to the door. They were already snorting with fear at the fire, and they now began to plunge and kick and rear until they had dragged themselves free and dashed off into the darkness.

Nor was this all the luck.

"Come," I cried to Volna. We ran to the shed and found our own animals standing ready saddled outside. "They were going to bolt on our horses," I said, as I put her in the saddle and then mounted.

"Which is the way?"

"Any way. We're in luck; let us trust to it," I answered; and guided by the light of the fire which was now consuming the whole house, we pushed along at random as quickly as we could. Fortune was with us still. We gained the road, and in a few minutes were rattling back at a brisk pace along the road we had travelled so laboriously in the storm some hours before.

"I had given everything up," said Volna, when we were breathing the horses and were able to talk.

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"I had the papers in my hand ready to throw them into the blaze."

"I am glad you didn't. We'll get them through yet; but just how to do it is the question. We've escaped by sheer luck and that old hag's devilment in firing the house; but they've got the passports, all my papers and what's almost as bad, nearly all my money."

"I have a little money. But do you think we could get across the frontier?"

"We shall have to do it at night, because we must manage to sneak over somewhere unseen. If we knew the district it would be easier; but even then we should have to lie low somewhere all through the day. We may bet on it that when that fellow gets back from the fire he'll spread out a pretty wide search party for us."

"Does Sylvia ever offer you suggestions?" she asked.

I smiled. "Has Peggy one?"

She nodded. "She's a little bit afraid to offer it."

"That's rather rough on Bob, isn't it?"

"Paul always ridicules anything I say—never thinks any woman, but Katinka, can have a sensible idea."

"Why shouldn't Bob think as much of Peggy's notions as Paul does of Katinka's?"

"I like that," she said, answering my smile. "But it's rather a wild suggestion."

"Let's have it."

"Couldn't we go back to that village, Kervatje, and get Father Ambrose to help us? He was mother's friend."

"Humph! It is rather a wild one, as you say."

"I believe we could trust him."

"And suppose he said no?"

"We could have shelter for the day at least and could try any other plan that offered."

"He might give us away."

"His eyes didn't look like that when he spoke of mother."

"We'd have to confess we fooled him."

"Leave me to do that."

"Your instinct is to trust him?"

"Yes. I feel as sure of him as I did of—of Bob that morning."

"That seals it. I can't mistrust that instinct. Come on;" and off we rattled again at a pace we relished a deal better than the scarcely rested horse under me.

"I wonder what has happened at the cottage," said Volna when we eased up later.

"I have a sort of sneaking hope that the woman got away despite her villainous attempt on us."

"What a fiend of a woman!"

"Her fiendishness it was that saved us from heaven knows what trouble. I was cudgelling my wits to know how to get out of the mess. She was a cunning devil, too, in her way."

"And the man, too. A man!"

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"She was the man in that house. Say what you will, it was awfully smart to spring that accusation against us."

"I hope she'll be punished," said Volna.

"Oh, she'll get there some day—if not now. But you are the wonder to me. To go through all you have in the last few hours and yet be as fresh as— as paint. Sylvia has pluck and all that; but she'd go to bed after a rough and tumble of this sort."

"That's the first thing I shall ask the priest to let me do."

"He'll be a bit surprised when we walk in, I expect," I laughed. "It's a pretty cool thing you're letting us into."

"Do you think there's any chance of our being followed?"

"Not yet. I fancy they'll have their hands full enough with the other couple. We shall be miles on our way before they could start after us; and it's too early for any one to be about to tell them which way we've gone."

This proved to be the case. We did not meet a soul until we had ridden many miles and were nearing the forked road at the top of the hill which the priest had mentioned to me. There we passed two or three peasants dressed in their best.

"That explains it," I said.

"What explains what?"

"Why we have seen no one about. It's Sunday morning and those people are going in to mass. Your friend the priest is evidently popular."

"Can we reach the village before mass time?"

"No. We had better finish the journey on foot. My idea is to turn off somewhere at the bottom of the hill and just leave the horses. We can't very well quarter them on the priest as well as ourselves. Besides, it would cause much more gossip than if we were to arrive on foot. And gossip is dangerous."

On reaching the bottom of the hill, we turned off and rode a mile or so, when I saw a shed in a very lonely spot on a hill side. I slipped the saddles off and led the horses through a couple of fields and shut them into the barn.

"No one is likely to be there till to-morrow, so we may get them again this afternoon if necessary," I said as I returned to Volna with the bridles. "There's a bit of feed on the place and that'll keep them quiet. Now we'll hide these things in the wood yonder; and leave the rest to chance."

I buried the saddles under a heap of brushwood, and we made our way back to the main road and soon reached the village.

"I feel disgracefully dirty," said Volna, as one or two of the villagers eyed us curiously.

"They'll only think we've come some distance to mass; and they are accustomed to the sight of dirty people about here."

Volna laughed. "Thank you. But even here the people wash themselves on Sunday."

"Here's the priest's house, next the church," I answered irrelevantly. We walked up to it and

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just as we reached the door it was opened by a woman, bonnetted and prayer book in hand.

I stepped inside without shewing any hesitation; as if we were expected. "Good-morning. Is Father Ambrose in his study or already at church?"

"The Father is in church, sir. You can't come in, please," she replied, resenting our intrusion.

"I was afraid we should be just too late and too early," I said lightly to Volna. "He said before ten or after half-past twelve. But we couldn't manage it."

"Is the Father expecting you, sir?"

"Well, not exactly at this moment evidently, or he would have told you to be ready for us. But we can wait, and my sister will be greatly obliged to you if you can let her just wash her face and hands."

"I am on my way to mass, sir; the Father said nothing to me of your coming."

"So I see, my good soul. But did he not tell you we were likely to come for breakfast?"

"The Father fasts until mass on Sunday, sir."

"Yes, of course, but I am not a priest: nor is my sister."

She hesitated and then led us into the study.

Volna threw herself with a sigh of fatigue on to one of the hard wooden chairs; took off her hat and with a smile exclaimed in the most natural way in the world: "Dear Father Ambrose. He is one of my mother's dearest friends."

It was such apparently ingenuous evidence of

sincerity that the good woman was instantly and most favourably impressed.

"Excuse me a minute," she said, and went out.

"How readily you tell them, Bob," said Volna, smiling.

"It was your acting that carried us through, young lady. Dear Father Ambrose, indeed. As if you had known him all your life."

"I think she's going to let us stay."

She came in again then, having taken off her bonnet. "Will you come with me?" she said to Volna, who rose. "The Father's dressing room is through there, sir," she added to me, pointing to a door.

I made use of it promptly; washed and shaved and did what I could to make myself look less like a tramp, before I returned to the good man's study.

I must confess that the prospect of meeting him was vastly less to my taste now than it had appeared when we were twenty miles away; and I paced the floor considerably ill at ease.

Presently Volna came in, looking as neat and natty as if all the events of the past day and a half were a dream.

"How on earth have you managed it?" I cried, gazing at her in sheer admiration.

"That is the dearest old soul, in whom nature ever planted the curiosity of a woman. She just fussed over me as though she was a hen and I her one chicken."

"You look as though you hadn't had anything to

make you turn a hair for the last fortnight. The way you girls manage these renovations always beats me. Twenty miles away you said you wanted to go to bed; and here you are as fresh as paint."

"You said that before; but it isn't paint," she answered. "I've another feeling now than a desire to sleep."

"So have I—disinclination to meet the priest. Is that what you mean?"

She laughed and shook her head. "No, indeed, I mean a desire to eat. I was never so hungry in my life."

"It's a very human feeling; but I wish you hadn't said anything about it," I replied.

"I'm a very human individual, if it comes to that. I declare I could even relish some of that awful woman's black bread."

Most aptly the housekeeper came to tell us she had prepared some breakfast for us in the opposite room. "The good Father would have wished this," she said. "It is the best I can do for the moment."

Eggs, ham, potted meats, good white wheaten bread, butter and delicious coffee needed no sort of apology. It was like a feast for the gods in our famished eyes; and down we sat at once. We had nearly finished and were lingering over the coffee and laughing carelessly together at something which Volna had said—I had my cup in my hand, I remember—when the door was opened all unexpectedly and the priest entered.

I don't think I ever felt so foolish and confused

in my life. I set the cup down, flushed to the roots of my hair, and rose with a most shame-faced, down-at-heel manner, stammering some kind of apology, as I met his grave, protesting, surprised look.

But Volna came to the rescue with magnificent self-possession. Girls have these inspirations and beat us hollow in such cases. Without a sign of awkwardness or self-consciousness she rose and went up to him, smiling winsomely.

"Father Ambrose, I am in sore trouble and have come to ask my dear mother's old friend to help me."

It was an inspiration. Nothing less. All the protest died out of his eyes in the softened look of puzzled inquiry he bent on her.

"Your mother?" he repeated, so gently.

"I am Volna Drakona." He turned toward me. "That was not the truth we told you yesterday. Before you condemn us, hear all our story. My mother's peril was the reason. You will listen to me?"

"I do not understand, but your mother's child could never appeal to me for a hearing in vain. And this gentleman?"

"He is Mr. Robert Anstruther, an Englishman, who has risked his liberty and his life to help me."

I saw that this partial explanation only added to the good man's utter bewilderment. He stood looking from one to the other of us and then passed his hand slowly across his brow. Next he laid it

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gently on Volna's head and smoothed her hair while he gazed into her face.

"Yes, you must be her daughter. Come to my study and just tell me everything."

He opened the door for her and I was following when he turned and said courteously but with unmistakable significance: "I will speak with you afterwards, sir."

Then the door closed on them.

CHAPTER XII

"SHE IS BETROTHED"

I WAS by no means sorry that Father Ambrose preferred to see Volna alone. It was her influence, not mine, which would have any effect upon him; and it was certain she would be able to exert that influence better alone than if I were present at the interview.

I judged, too, that the priest was shrewd enough to see the wisdom of hearing our story from us separately. I had already told him one falsehood and Volna had acquiesced in it; so that we could not blame him for using any caution which his suspicions might prompt.

That she would win him round to her side, I had little doubt. My faith in her made me very confident. But what would he do then? What could he do? How could he, a mere parish priest, help us to turn our failure into success and get those papers to Cracow?

I had ample time to meditate upon this, for it was more than an hour before he came back to me. He looked exceedingly grave and troubled, and asked me to go to his study. Volna was not there. He took his seat at his writing-table and waved me to one opposite to him; and for a moment or two he said nothing.

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I felt very uncomfortable. Somewhat as I used to feel in the old Corpus days when carpeted by the Head. He pressed his finger tips together, and when he spoke there was a mixture of censure and kindness in his tone.

"Mr. Anstruther, I don't know how you regard the falsehood you told me yesterday and induced my friend's child to act?"

"It was on the impulse of the moment, and I am compelled to admit it was only one of many I have had to tell in the last two days. But don't think it is my habit to lie."

"Your name is really Robert Anstruther."

"Yes. But I can give you no proof. My papers were taken——"

He interrupted with a wave of the hand. "I know. I am aware that I must take your word."

"I have perhaps deserved that word 'must,' but it rankles. If you feel that my action yesterday prevents your believing what I tell you, we may as well close this conversation at once."

"Spoken hastily, like a young man, but not unnatural, perhaps, in the circumstances. That you should have deceived me with such ready speciousness is scarcely calculated, however, to convince me of your good faith. Perhaps you can appreciate that."

His cold tone and calm clear glance emphasized this, and it hurt. I made no reply and dropped my eyes.

"Can you see that?"

"You are quite entitled to take your own view of it, of course. But if the conditions were repeated, I should probably do it again."

"Then you would do very wrong, Mr. Anstruther," he said, with some warmth. "A falsehood is not only a sin in the eyes of the church, but wrong in every way."

"I daresay you are quite right. I have never tried it as a policy before, and it has landed us in a pretty bad mess. But if you can show me how we could have got out of the hands of the police without lying, I'll listen readily. And if we had got into them, the mess would have been much worse than it is."

"If you had been candid with me yesterday, all the troubles since then would have been avoided."

"They would also have been avoided if the storm had not overtaken us and we had not lost our way. But can we do any good by dissecting causes? I am man enough I hope not to shirk responsibility for my acts. I take all these lies on my own shoulders. They appeared to be necessary. The necessity no longer exists, and I shall tell you none. If you can't believe me, there is an end of things. That's all."

He sat for perhaps a minute frowning in thoughtful silence. "Will you tell me exactly all that has occurred?"

"Has Volna told you?" I asked.

"Yes; but I wish to hear it from you also."

"A natural precaution," I admitted; and then

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told him as succinctly as I could everything from the moment of the meeting at Bratinsk station.

He listened very closely, interposing some questions now and then, and when I finished lapsed into thought again.

Presently, with a smile, he said: "You have left some things unmentioned."

"Not intentionally."

"Descriptive of your own acts in places—at least, as told to me."

"I have said all that need be said. Volna may take an exaggerated view of some things."

"I think I have done you an injustice, Mr. Anstruther."

"That is of no consequence."

"Tell me, why did you plunge into this hazardous matter?"

"I don't think that matters. Put it that I liked the prospect of an adventure. That is quite true."

"Is it all the truth?"

"There is no falsehood in it, Father. We'll leave it there, please."

He looked at me very earnestly indeed and then held out his hand. "Will you let me beg your pardon?" he asked.

I grasped the hand cordially and shook my head.

"No, I will not. If I had been in your place I should have been much more suspicious. You hurt me when you thought I might lie to you. But you see now that I shall not. And that's all."

"The child is very dear to me for her mother's

ake, and I see that you had absolutely nothing to expect in helping her except the risk and danger that you ran."

"I ran no risk. I have powerful and very influential friends who will see me through all right."

"That I did not understand," he said quickly. "It makes a difference. It will be easier." He spoke rather to himself than to me it seemed. "You are sure you can rely upon your friends?" he asked presently.

"My father carried through some large financial matters for the German Government from time to time, and I myself have had evidence of the good will of several men high in office in Berlin."

"But this is Russia, Mr. Anstruther."

"True, but their influence would not stop at the frontier. You may take it from me, I am in no sort of danger."

"What are your plans?"

"To get those papers through to Cracow. How, may depend upon you in some measure."

He paused and then said slowly: "They are on their way already."

I sat up in intense surprise. "On their way? Why, has——"

He understood the unfinished question and smiled. "No, she has not taken them. But they will be in Cracow to-night. A day has been lost—precious hours, perhaps—by your action yesterday."

I drew a deep breath of bewilderment.

"You do not understand the wide-reaching in-

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fluence of the Fraternity, Mr. Anstruther, and had better ask no questions. But now that the papers are gone, what are your plans?"

"I had not got as far as that. I have none."

"You will wish to return to England?"

I hesitated. There was something behind his question I could not read. "I suppose so—yes, of course I shall return there. My home is there."

He bent a kind but searching look on me. "I hope you think I am your friend as well as——" he said after a pause, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"Oh, yes indeed. I should be sorry not to think so. Is—is Volna going home to Warsaw?"

"Have you been quite frank with me? I don't mean that unkindly," he hastened to add in reply to a start from me. "As to your motive in all this? It will be best to be quite frank. Young folks are young folks all the world over."

"I should be sorry to misunderstand you," I said.

"You entered into this thing from love—of adventure only?"

"As it is over, does my motive matter?"

He shook his head slowly. "It may. It may. I don't know. It may. I am so afraid of appearing impertinent, or of making a mistake. We old people fall so readily into mistakes," he said with a deprecating smile.

"Don't you think the best way to avoid them is to speak plainly?"

He picked up a sheet of paper and played with it

with a suggestion of nervousness. "I am tempted to tell you a story, a chapter of my life, Mr. Anstruther. I was not originally intended for the priesthood; but was to have married. I was betrothed, in fact. Then something happened—the result of misunderstanding—I knew afterwards how easily it could have been avoided, but it was not avoided; other influences intervened, and—and so the marriage which took place was not mine; and I am now a priest with just a memory. Does that incline you to any special frankness with me as to your motives in this?"

"You mean with regard to Volna?"

He looked at me again very intently. "You know that she is betrothed?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. She told me her uncle's plans."

His look now was more sympathetic and kind than searching; and he sighed. "Ah, you do not know, I see."

"I am not a child, Father Ambrose."

"I can say no more. I ought not, perhaps, to have said so much. I am going to deal with you as a man, Mr. Anstruther. Of course all that has occurred in these two days must never be mentioned. The dear child's future must not be compromised."

"It will not pass my lips."

"You and I together can secure her safety; I am going to ask your help. She will remain here until I can get her back safely to Warsaw."

"I will do anything to secure her safety."

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"The one thing you can do is to put yourself in the hands of the police."

"The police?"

"You say your friends will help you in any explanation."

"I don't follow you yet."

"The police have tracked you here from Bratsinsk. They were in the village yesterday evening. They are coming to me again this afternoon. It happens that my housekeeper's niece was to have come here to-day—in a village like this all private matters are public; you know. She is not coming, but Volna can take her place for the time without any suspicion being aroused. What you have to do is to cause the police to believe that Volna has crossed the frontier with you and that you have returned alone."

"How cause them to believe this?"

"Go and get your horse and ride through the village this afternoon and call here."

"Here!" I cried in astonishment.

"Yes. I shall then send for the police agents and hand you over to them, as the man who told me the falsehoods yesterday. This will clear this house of the danger of any suspicion."

I could not restrain a smile, remembering how he had emphasized the heinousness of falsehoods. "It will at least be in a good cause," I said.

"God forgive me—but the child must be saved, Mr. Anstruther. You'll do this?"

"Why, of course."

"And when your trouble is over, you will go to England?"

"One thing at a time. They might send me to Siberia."

"It will be best so," he said earnestly.

"What? Siberia for me?" I laughed.

"No, no. God forbid. England—England as soon as you can."

"And Volna? Does she—know of this?"

"Indeed, no. Her one thought is of the trouble she may already have brought upon you. She would never agree to it."

I believed that. "Should I—see her to—to say good-bye?"

This perplexed him. "It would be better not, but"—his eyes wandered all round the room before he finished—"I suppose she would wish it. And you won't meet again and—and you'll tell her you are going home to England?"

"I'm afraid you must leave it to me what to say," I replied, with a smile. "I think you may trust my discretion. And you must do your part afterwards carefully. Keep her out of the way when we play the comedy of that arrest later, or she may cast herself for a part in it. She's plucky enough to avow herself, and that would mix things up a good deal for us all, you know."

He frowned, threw up his hands in troubled perplexity and pushed his chair back.

"We had better get it over," he exclaimed resignedly. "I'll go and tell her you are leaving."

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He walked toward the door, paused, and turned as if to say something more, then tossed up his hands again and went out of the room.

I stared out of the window into the small, but carefully tended garden, a prey to the very mixed thoughts which the good Father had succeeded in rousing.

Then the door opened and Volna came in alone.

CHAPTER XIII

VOLNA IS A LITTLE REFRACTORY

SHE was dressed for her new character of the housekeeper's niece, and wore a white apron and a peasant girl's picturesque head-dress.

She closed the door behind her, dropped me a little curtsey and said with the demurest of glances: "Did you please to send for me, sir?" Then she burst out laughing and ran to me, both hands outstretched, as though we had not met for a long time. "No... wasn't my instinct right?"

I held her hands apart while I surveyed her costume. "Who was ever so foolish as to question it?"

"And isn't the Father just the dearest old man in the world?"

"The world is a big place and there are lots of old men in it," I answered. "But I knew you would win him round. He had no chance against you."

She laughed gaily. "He lectured me, however."

"So he did me."

"And to think that if we had only known, he would have taken care of those papers yesterday."

"And have saved us from all the horrors of last night."

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She shot a glance at me. "And have freed you from the encumbrance of a very troublesome sister twenty-four hours ago."

"Yes, indeed; if we had only known."

"You're in a very agreeing mood."

"I am no longer a brother and must be polite."

"Do you call that politeness?"

"Politeness or—policy."

"Well, whichever it is, it's not a bit nice. Not a bit like—Bob."

"You forget. Bob is my own name, as well as my friend Garrett's."

"How formal you are. What is the matter? You can't be annoyed about anything Father Ambrose has said to you? Nor about his having helped us? What is it?"

"I didn't even know I was formal."

She turned away to the priest's table and sat in his chair turning over the books on the desk. I sat facing her as I had faced the priest. Once she sighed, and once shrugged her shoulders, and twice glanced across at me in perplexity.

She was very pretty; very bewitching; more pretty and bewitching than ever, in my eyes; but I was conscious of a new restraint—a something like a barrier between us which had not been there before. I couldn't speak with the old freedom; in fact, I could think of nothing to say.

"Father Ambrose tells me you are going away," she said at length, her fingers still busy with the books.

"Yes, I am going away. I—I thought you'd like me just to say good-bye."

"Well, I should hope so, indeed. After what you've done for me."

"Never mind about that, please. I think I must be off."

I rose; but she paid no heed, just sitting on at the table, her face averted and her fingers moving the books restlessly. I looked out of the window, fidgetted a moment, and then turned again.

"Yes, I think it's time."

"Of course I won't keep you," she said then; very stiffly and without looking at me.

"Good-bye then."

She rose and held out her hand. "Good-bye." She turned her face to me and her lip quivered as she bit it. I recalled the priest's words about her betrothal; and clamped down my feelings as I took her hand and pressed it.

"I wish you God-speed with all my heart," I said.

She lowered her eyes again and her hand fell listlessly as I released it and turned to the door. I had nearly reached it when I heard the rustle of her cotton dress and turned to find her at my elbow.

"But you're not going to part like this?"

I should have liked to part in a very different fashion could I have had my way. But I could not.

"Father Ambrose thinks that I had better go; and of course he is right."

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"But Bob and Peggy haven't said good-bye. Oh, think of all we've gone through together. Don't go away angry with me like this."

"Angry! God forbid. Why you're just the bravest little soul I ever met in all my life. And some day I hope Sylvia and you will meet, and—and——" I scarcely knew what I was saying and ended in partial incoherence.

"That's more like you. I mean it's more natural, except that you generally know exactly what you want to say and say it. Are you going to—to England?"

"I don't think I *have* any definite plans. I——"

Her laughter stopped me. She shook her forefinger with laughing assumption of gravity. "If I had not ceased to be Peggy, I should say you were hiding something from me. And you know how true Peggy's instincts are?"

"What should I have to hide?" I asked with a smile.

"What a mask of a smile," she cried, with a lifting of the hands. "Father Ambrose is a wonderful man; he has changed you completely in an hour." She turned back to the table and sat down again. "I suppose it couldn't be helped," she added half to herself with a sigh.

"What could not be helped?"

She did not reply at once but looked up at me from under her long lashes, while her feet tapped the floor quickly and irritably. "Of course you are doing this with a purpose," she said after the pause.

"Why? Oh, don't pretend to misunderstand me. You know as well as I do that you're entirely changed. It's so unjust. What have I done? You know that after all you've done for me I wouldn't do anything to anger you for all the world."

"Don't persist about my being angry."

"Well, offended, then, only it's such a stupid word. Estranged, alienated, changed; any word you like. Something has happened—something has come between us. Do you treat Sylvia like this? It's maddening."

"There is no change in me," I protested.

She laughed. "It's in me, then, you mean. That's almost cowardly—at least it would be if any one but you said it." Then with a start her eyes opened wide; she rose and stared at me with parted lips; and a vivid blush spread all over her face. "I believe I understand. You think in your English way, that I have been too forward, unwomanly, too,—oh!" and she covered her crimson cheeks with her white strenuous fingers.

"Don't say that, please. Why the time we've been together has been the brightest thing in the world to me."

She took her hands from her face and sat down again staring at the table while the flush died out of her cheeks slowly. "I've gone all over that sentence. That 'has been' is the clue. Now I see. It's all over and we are conventional again." With an exaggerated affectation of a society manner she rose very slowly, held out her hand and simpered:

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"I hope you will have a pleasant journey, Mr. Anstruther. The weather 's still open enough to be excellent for travelling. Will you make my compliments to your sister, and say I hope to see her some day?"

I could not restrain a smile, but not a muscle of her face moved; she kept up the vapid simper. "I will give your message," I said, and tried to take her hand; but she just let me touch her finger-tips and then bowed.

"I am so pleased to have met you; and thank you so much for all you have done. I hope you'll not take cold from the rain. Colds are *such* distressing afflictions." Then another sudden change. With a stamp of her foot she threw her head back and her rich blue eyes sparkled. "Is that better?"

I bowed. "I am sorry you so misunderstand."

"Misunderstand!" she repeated, quickly. "I don't misunderstand that if you were the kind of masculine formality you have been acting here this morning you would never have done what you have for me in the last two days. I am only a woman, of course—wait, you will wish to see Father Ambrose again before you go. I'll tell him;" and she crossed to the door.

"Good-bye," I said, but she paid no heed and went out of the room. It was not the kind of parting I had looked for, but I smothered my regrets. It was better so.

We could not go on being Bob and Peggy to one another of course; and yet we had been too closely

associated to drop back into mere formal friendliness again without a wrench. She couldn't see this in a moment; but she would understand it later; and—well, the sooner I was away, the better for my peace of mind.

Then she came back bringing the priest with her. He was very plastic clay in her white young hands. He wore a look of deep and almost comical perplexity, and was obviously very ill at ease.

"Now, Father, please. What have you said or done to Mr. Anstruther to change him in this short time?"

He glanced half appealingly at me; but I was as little at ease as he was. "My dear child, I—I—er——"

"You have lectured me already on the wisdom and necessity of complete frankness, Father," she interposed significantly.

"It is very difficult to gather——" he got no farther, for she held up a warning finger and shook it at him with a laugh and then placed it on his lips.

"There shall not be any difficulty," she declared. "For two days Mr. Anstruther has been just like a brother to me; treating me perfectly frankly and saying as candidly as any brother whatever was in his thoughts. We made a compact that he should do that, and he kept it honestly. I left him in that mood when I first saw you. You then had a long talk with him and I found him entirely changed; keeping something from me; formal in manner;

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saying things he didn't mean and meaning others he didn't say. Instead of a brother, he was an acquaintance. You caused this by something you said. Now tell me, please."

The good man was helpless; so I went to the rescue. "It is time for me to go. You can discuss this when I have left."

"Wait a moment. Two things I am certain of. You two have arranged to do something that affects me and you won't tell me; and you, Father, have said something about me which has changed Mr. Anstruther. I won't stand that. I won't let him go as if we were just how-d'ye-do—and—good-bye acquaintances. He has saved me from prison, and I just can't do it."

The embarrassment was becoming almost painful. "I should never think of you as a mere acquaintance; but please let me go," I said.

"Yes. You may go. Good-bye—but don't attempt to help me any more if you *do* go in that way. I will not let either of you help me, if you mean to deceive me;" and with fingers that trembled she took off the head-dress and laid aside her apron. "If you will not tell me, I will go by myself and take my chance."

"My dear child," protested the priest.

"I will. I will. My mind is made up."

"You had better tell her," I said to the priest then.

She smiled, but through the promise of tears. "You know me, don't you?"

Father Ambrose then told her the scheme in regard to my arrest and we both enlarged upon the absence of risk to me. She neither acquiesced nor vetoed it. "That's number one. What is number two? What have you told Mr. Anstruther?"

"You want to rule with a pretty strong iron rod, don't you?" I said. "But there is nothing to tell that need be told."

"Tell me," she cried to Father Ambrose. "I will know, or——"

"I only told him such facts about you as you had told me," complied the priest, taking refuge in generalities.

She stood thinking, shooting quick inquiring glances at us in turn.

"I ask you not to insist on anything more than that," I urged.

A gleam of understanding was in her eyes and a semi-mischievous smile hovering about her lips as she returned: "Who asked that?"

"Bob Garrett," I declared promptly.

The smile deepened. "What will the police do with him?" she asked Father Ambrose. "Take him to Cracow?"

"More probably to Warsaw," was the reply; "but as we told you, his friends will see he comes to no harm of any sort. You are quite sure of that, are you not, Mr. Anstruther?"

"I haven't the faintest doubt of it;" and at this Volna looked quite her happy self.

"I may as well put these on again, then," she

said, and she slipped on the apron and arranged the quaint head-dress. When she looked next at me her face was almost preternaturally grave, except her expressionful eyes.

"You see now what a lot of time would have been saved if you had been frank like Bob, and not tried to deceive me like Mr. Anstruther. I can say good-bye, just as formally as you please, now I know why you are going."

I took her hand and pressed it. "You'll stay here and let this thing go through all right?"

"Yes. Father Ambrose wishes it. Good-bye, Mr. Anstruther, and good-bye—Bob."

"Good-bye—Peggy. I may say that for the last time."

"Yes, for the last time, of course. I am Volna, after to-day." She looked into my eyes with an odd inscrutable expression in hers and smiled. "You'll be all right, or else I shouldn't agree. But I know you, and I am sure."

Then I hurried out of the room followed by the priest.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ARREST

AS it was desirable for the success of our plan that I should not be seen when I fetched my horse, the priest pointed out a way across the fields; and then gave me one of the greatest surprises of that time.

"Considering what you are doing I must trust you with a dangerous secret. You will give me your honour never to reveal it?"

I gave him the pledge readily.

"The owner of the shed where you left the horses is named Jacob Posen; and he may have found them, and raise difficulties. In that case you will say to him; 'I am a peasant farmer, friend.' He will probably reply; 'You seem in a hurry?' and you will answer: 'Immediate.' His next question if he asks it, will be: 'Your name?' In reply you will raise your left hand with the forefinger extended, the tip to be level with your eyes, and the back of the hand toward him, and say: 'In the eye of God.' He will then offer to shake hands with you; but you will refuse and look steadily at him. He will then be ready to help you." He illustrated the peculiar gesture.

The inner significance of this was not difficult to see. "Peasant farmer, friend," clearly stood for

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"P. F. F."—the Polish Freedom Fraternity. The word "Immediate" was for one with a similar initial—probably Independence; while the gesture was for recognition purposes with a subtle reference to the righteousness of the cause and the far-reaching extent of the movement.

I was profoundly impressed by the incident. Here I was in a little village of nowhere, far removed from the busy cities where revolution has its birth and conspiracy is cradled; and yet the ramifications were so widespread, the arrangements so perfected, and the secret means so ready to hand, that Father Ambrose—as mild a mannered man as ever wore a priest's stole—was able in a few minutes to find one agent to carry the dangerous papers to Cracow, and then another to help me in my scheme.

Until then I had never regarded the Fraternity as a serious national force; my opinion being influenced by the fact that my friend, Count Ladislas, was one of the leaders.

I knew him for a man whose habit of mind led him to shirk responsibility, to act on impulse, to be swayed by the last word, and to veer this way and that when a decision had to be made. It was impossible to think of him as leading a movement which called for practical, earnest and sustained effort, for the resolute overcoming of innumerable difficulties, the persistent, steady, battling against odds, and the uninterrupted, unceasing educative work needed here.

He was a man of dreams, ideas, theories, and principles; and here were the results of steady action, hard work, stern realities and tireless practice.

I seemed to realize for the first time how real was the danger from which Volna had to be saved and how grave the risk to which her friends in Warsaw had so thoughtlessly exposed her.

Even if our little scheme now were successful and I managed to lead the police off her track, there was serious reason to fear that fresh danger might await her in Warsaw; and at that moment a thought occurred to me and, despite the seriousness of things, I laughed aloud.

In our last interview she had shewn a dozen moods in as many sentences, to my infinite bewilderment; but I thought now of something which had escaped me at the moment. Her cheerfulness had returned when she knew I was likely to be taken to Warsaw.

Will any one blame me if in my egoism I interpreted this as a sign that she hoped we should meet again there? We had parted for always and said a last good-bye; but she had taken the parting lightly, because the "always" would last only until we were both in Warsaw. That was why I laughed.

The laughter had a short life, however. It died suddenly as I remembered how Father Ambrose had spoken of Volna's betrothal. There was something more than I knew of in that; Volna herself had spoken of an entanglement; and I was worrying

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over the puzzle when I reached the top of a sloping meadow and saw below me the shed I was seeking.

There was no one about as I hurried down the hill. I was glad, as I had no mind for indulgence in cabalistic signs, and all the rest of it.

But I had been seen; and as I was unfastening the door a man came round the end of the shed.

"Well?" A very blunt but significant monosyllable.

"Are you Jacob Posen?" He nodded. He was a big, heavy, black-bearded, powerful man.

"I have come for my horse."

"What do you mean? This is my barn. I have no horse of yours."

"I am a peasant farmer, friend."

He laughed, giving no sign that he understood; but he was only acting, for he said with a sneer:

"You seem in a hurry?"

"Immediate."

His laugh changed to a scowl and he growled in a tone of almost savage anger, "Your name?" I was almost surprised an oath did not follow.

I made the sign and answered, "In the eye of God."

His face changed suddenly and affecting an air of good fellowship he thrust out his hand. I refused it and just looked him in the face.

His taciturn expression returned and he opened the door of the barn.

"I saw you put them both in and wondered," he said, "Shall I fetch the saddle or will you?"

"Better you; I don't wish to be seen."

"Both?"

"No, mine only. Hide the other and the horse."

He went off at once leaving me marvelling more than ever. He was soon back and himself slipped on the saddle and bridle. Nothing more was said until I was ready to mount.

"You bought him in Bratinsk and this in Pulta. What shall I do with it?"

"It mustn't be found twenty miles west of here; and this revolver must be hidden," I added, as I gave him the weapon I had taken at Schirmskad.

"I understand. God keep us all."

"God keep us all," I repeated, assuming that to be another secret sign. As I rode off, I saw him return to the coppice where the other saddle was and carry it back to the barn.

I rode leisurely in the direction of the village, on the lookout for some sign of the police and running over in my mind the story I should tell.

Such of the villagers as were about gaped at me and two or three children followed. As I was playing a part and did not know whose eyes might be upon me, I thought it best to play thoroughly.

"Which is the priest's house?" I asked one of the women; and she pointed it out. I beckoned to the children and throwing them some kopecks bade them tell the Father I wished to speak to him.

He came out and I raised my hat and said in a voice loud enough for others to hear: "I am the Englishman who passed through the village yester-

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'day and spoke with you, Father. I have had all my money taken from me and have thought it best to come to you."

"Come into the house," he said gravely. As I dismounted and fastened my horse to the railing, he drew a woman aside and whispered to her; then led the way to the door. "I have sent for the police agents," he told me. "They have been some half hour in the village."

"I am quite ready;" and as we sat waiting I told him hurriedly what had passed with Jacob Posen, and that I thought Volna's horse should be hidden.

"Do you really need any money?" he asked.

"No, I think not. I shall get back my letter of credit."

Soon we heard footsteps outside.

"They are here. I almost regret this," he said hurriedly.

"I think it splendid. Now for the play." Then I raised my voice, and spoke excitedly. "The men took my letter of credit, and if you do not help me what am I to do? Some one shall pay for this." I got up and held the door partly open. "If you can't do it, you can't of course; but I daren't stay here."

"You cannot go," said the Father. "I have sent for the police."

"Not go, I'll see about that," I cried angrily, and rushed out to be instantly seized by my friend of the Devil's Staircase and a companion.

"No, no. We'll see about your going," sneered the fellow. "You're right, Father Ambrose, this is the man we seek. Thank you for keeping him here and sending for us."

"Ah, so it's you again, eh?" I said.

"Yes; and you won't get away this time."

I turned on the priest viciously. "And this is your idea of Christianity, eh? To get me inside your house in order to betray me to the hounds. I wish you joy of your creed."

"Don't insult the Father. He has only done his duty." The irony of the praise for the falsehood we had acted together, struck the good man and I saw him wince.

"I have done what I have done," he murmured.

"See if he's armed," ordered the agent. "He stole my revolver."

"Your comrades took it from me in their turn. You'll find it at Schirmskad. I'm not armed. I don't need any weapons any longer."

He looked up with a scowl, and a start. "Schirmskad?"

I laughed significantly. "On my way to the frontier. You're too late, my friend; and within the next few hours I am going to show you what a fool you've made of yourself."

"Where's the woman?"

"Wire to Schirmskad and ask who escaped when the cottage of wood-cutter Krempel was burned down last night. You know how near that is to the frontier." I did not, but I bluffed him.

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"Did he ride up alone?" he asked Father Ambrose.

"Yes, at the moment I sent for you."

"You'll answer for this," he cried angrily.

"That's exactly what I've ridden back for. Your fellows at that cottage took my money and papers; so, as soon as I had done what I set out to do, I rode back. On my way I came to this priest here; as he knows I am an Englishman; and instead of helping me, he arranged for my arrest. You Russian Poles are a nice friendly Christian people, the whole lot of you."

"Where were you going?"

"Why to Bratinsk, of course—where the rest of my things are and I am well enough known to borrow money until I can get some from England."

"A likely story," he sneered.

"You needn't believe it. Your sneers don't affect me a kopeck. This particular episode being closed I am going back to my hunting at Bratinsk."

"You'll find the episode, as you call it, isn't closed. You'll have to answer for it and must come with me."

"I haven't the least objection now."

He thanked Father Ambrose again and we left the house. They walked one on each side of me, and one of the villagers led my horse. In this way I was marched to the police quarters of the village—just a cottage, pretty much like that of an ordinary county policeman at home.

There he wanted to catechize me afresh about

Volna; but I stopped him. "I shall say nothing about that and nothing more about myself. I am ready to go wherever you please to take me, and having no longer any reason to resist, will do what you wish. You know who I am, because you saw my papers at Bratinsk before any of this fuss occurred. Take me to your superiors and I'll convince them in half an hour that the sooner I am at liberty again, the better for all concerned."

"I am in charge of this," he cried, bristling with authority. "You have aided the escape of a revolutionary and must answer for it."

"I am an Englishman. Take me to your superiors," I said; and to that phrase I stuck, repeating it doggedly to his every question, until I had tired out his patience and worn his temper to shreds.

I was then left in a room with a man to guard me while a carriage was got ready; when I was handcuffed and bundled into it pretty roughly. I knew the road of course and soon saw they were taking me to Solden.

I was carried to the police quarters there and shut up in a cell; still with a man to guard me. Meanwhile they communicated with the police at Schirmskad; and after some time I was taken from the cell and confronted with the chief of the men who had nearly captured me at the woodcutter's cottage.

"I am glad to see you," I told him. "You have my passport, papers, and letter of credit. I demand their return."

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"Where is your companion and who is she?"

"Who is the chief here?" I asked.

"Answer me, you dog," he cried with an oath, raising his hand.

"I am an Englishman with very powerful friends; no mere peasant to be kicked and hounded by you. Lay a finger on me, if you dare." The two conferred together; my papers were taken out and examined; and a third man called to the conference.

"Where is your companion and who is she?" demanded the man again.

"Take me to your superiors," I said; and from that reply I would not be moved. At last I was sent back to the cell with the guard to watch me as before.

I was getting on better than I had even hoped. My insistent repetition of the fact that I was an Englishman had had its effect.

The Warsaw agent who had seen me first at Bratinsk had no doubt satisfied himself on the point; and from what I had seen in the recent conference, he had made this clear to the others.

My chief anxiety was about food. It was now late in the afternoon and having had nothing since the breakfast at the priest's house I was egregiously hungry. I recalled my experience at Pulta station and began to speculate what effect a gold coin would have upon my guard. He was a heavy stupid-looking fellow; but the biggest fool in Russia knows the difference between a gold piece and a kopeck.

The coins in my pocket had not been taken from me and although I was still handcuffed I was able to wriggle my hand into my pocket and get some out. The man watched me sullenly.

"I am hungry," I said.

"Prisoners mustn't talk."

"I have had no food for hours. Wouldn't this buy some?" and I held up a couple of roubles.

"Silence," he growled, with a surly frown.

I substituted a gold piece for the two silver ones.

"Food is perhaps dear in Solderen."

He fidgetted uneasily, his eyes on the gold. I put the three coins together. "The silver for the food, and gold for the waiter," I said.

He sighed regretfully. "Impossible," he murmured.

"Mayn't you buy food for yourself? Have you had supper?"

His eyes gleamed. A slow smile of cunning spread over his face. He stretched out his hand. I put the two silver coins into it. "One pays the waiter at the end of dinner."

He was disappointed, and stood glancing from the coins in the palm of his hand to me and back from me to the coins. Then he decided to earn the gold.

He knocked on the door of the cell and a comrade came. They whispered together; the coins jingled; and the comrade departed.

In half an hour he returned with some food: a cold chicken, some bread and tea. The cost was

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probably under a rouble and the comrade had thus paid himself in advance.

There was no knife; so I had to eat the fowl as best I could; pulling the joints asunder and gnawing the flesh. But I was too hungry to bother about that. When I had finished I gave the man the gold piece.

"I must give him something," he grumbled.

"Give him what you like out of that," I answered, getting a very black look from him.

After the food, sleep became insistent. I had not slept since Pulta, and had done a good deal in the meantime. I was as tired as a hound after a long day, and had scarcely settled myself on the bench against the corner of the wall before I was off.

Not for long, however. I dreamed that some huge monster animal was suffocating me and woke to find it was my guard's heavy coat sleeve pressing against my face as he leaned across to get at the pocket where my money was.

"Helping yourself, are you?"

He got up hurriedly and a couple of coins fell from his hand to the floor.

"I only wanted to see you were comfortable," he mumbled.

"You thought the money might make too a big a lump for comfort, eh? Very nice of you. Your officer counted it, so you can tell him how much you've taken. It'll be all right."

He swore—perhaps at the feebleness of the sar-

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casm; but he thrust the money back and sat down in his chair again glowering at me.

I settled myself in my corner once more and slept this time until somebody shook me violently.

It was my friend of the Devil's Staircase; and he bade me get up at once and go with him.

I yawned. "Where to?"

"To my superiors," he answered with a grin; thinking it a joke no doubt to throw my own words back at me.

CHAPTER XV

A TASTE OF PRISON LIFE

OUTSIDE in the corridor the man from Schirm-skad was waiting, and the two drove me to the railway station and hustled me into a railway carriage. They would not say where I was being taken, but I did not care much, and five minutes after I entered the train, I was fast asleep.

When I awoke it was daylight. A bleak, desolate, grey morning, for the snow had come at last, and was falling heavily. I was cold and stiff from the cramped position, and sore from the jolting of the train—one never understands how a train *can* jolt until after an experience in what they call a fast train in Russian Poland—and as I sat up, yawned, and rubbed my eyes, every bone in my body seemed to ache.

My guards were both asleep. Had I been minded I could have taken their weapons and shot them both as they rolled in their corners, snoring loudly enough to have drowned the sound of the shots.

I roused them both, and with a great shew of politeness told them what I could have done. They both swore at me.

"It's really very wrong of you to go to sleep in

such a case," I said amiably. "You had no right to subject a prisoner to such a temptation. I fear I shall be compelled to report you."

"You're a cool hand," growled the Schirmskad man.

"Not nearly so cold as you would soon have been if I had done it," I retorted, and the grimness of the joke seemed to appeal to them. "But Englishmen don't do that kind of thing."

"To hell with the English," he said.

"That's not pretty, but it's nothing to what you'll feel like saying before you are through with me. One of you took me for a spy, or a conspirator, and the other for a thief or a murderer. It was brilliant."

"Who are you, then?" growled the Warsaw man. They were both sleepy and ill-tempered, and thus very easy to bait.

"If I had been either spy or murderer, I suppose even you can see that I should have shot you just now instead of going on contentedly to explain things." The train ran through a station then, and I caught sight of the name Tischnov. I knew the place to be some twenty miles from Warsaw. I began to chuckle, and presently burst into a loud laugh.

"What is it now?"

"I am thinking of your promotion," I grinned.

"They tell me that the man who makes the biggest mistakes gets promoted instantly for fear the blunder should be known and police prestige suffer.

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I expect you'll be heads of departments by to-morrow, you two, with decorations."

"We've had enough of your insolence."

"You asked me why I smiled. Why, when your Minister of the Interior hears from my dear old friend, General von Eckerstein—he used to represent Germany at Petersburg, you know—how you've treated me, you'll get such a sweet message from him."

The Schirmskad man swore, but his companion looked serious. I continued to chaff them with much enjoyment for ten miles; and the Warsaw agent grew more and more uneasy at every word I dropped relative to my having well-known friends.

"What do you know about General von Eckerstein?" he asked at length.

"That he doesn't like his friends to wear this kind of ornament;" and I held up my handcuffs.

"If you'll give me your word not to escape, I'll take them off," he replied, very sheepishly.

"Not for the world, now. I shall be able to tell the General how it feels to be dragged through the streets of Warsaw manacled like a felon."

The two whispered together for some minutes, and then the Warsaw man said: "We're not afraid of your escaping. I'll take them off."

I let him do it, of course. "A bit uncomfortable about it all, eh? It's beginning to dawn on you at last that I'm not a dangerous revolutionary?" I said, as I rubbed my chafed wrists. "You're only at the beginning of your lesson, though."

"I have done no more than my duty," he muttered.

"We shall see about that before the day's over, my friend," I answered sharply.

When we reached Warsaw I was driven to the police headquarters. I was expected, and after a few minutes I was taken to a room where some half dozen men were awaiting me, among them being the two who had brought me to Warsaw. The chief was sitting at a heavily bepapered table.

"Stand there," he said, pointing to a spot opposite to him.

Two things were evident. The chief was a man high in authority—the deferential manner of the rest shewed this—and the proceedings were stage-managed with a view to impress me with the solemnity and seriousness of the occasion. I took my cue accordingly, and was as non halant as I could be. "Why stand?" I asked.

"You are a prisoner," he rapped out, with a frown.

"On what charge?"

"Don't question me. Your name?"

I looked at him steadily and kept silent. The frown deepened and he repeated "Your name; do you hear?"

"Of course I hear you; but if I am a prisoner I decline to answer any questions until I know the charge against me."

"Don't trifle with me. Refuse to answer and you go to the cells."

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"That as you please. Your agent there knows my name perfectly well and that I am a British subject. I claim my rights as one."

The reply only served to increase his anger. The flesh about his nose and mouth began to grow white as it will with some men in passion. He was a bully, and probably hated the English like so many of his countrymen.

"Answer me, you——" The epithet was lost in the loud cough of a man near him.

"You have the only answer I shall give until I know the charge."

"Take him away," he ordered, with a wave of the hand.

"I demand to communicate with the British Consul," I said, "and with my friend, General von Eckerstein."

"Take him away," he repeated; and I was led off and placed in a cell. If he thought to frighten me, the effort had failed. He had put himself in the wrong, and I knew that my turn would come.

It was a filthy, foul-smelling place they put me in, and they kept me in it all day without food or even water.

In the evening I was taken again before the man, and the scene of the morning was repeated in pretty much the same terms and with the same result. But my back was up, and I vowed I'd rather starve than give in.

I passed a miserable night, famished with hunger,

parched with thirst, and half stifled with the reeking foulness of the place.

In the morning an official came to the cell to try a different method. He was less of a ruffian than his superior, and sought to convince me of the uselessness of contumacity.

I let him talk without once replying to his questions until he was in the act of leaving. "I am a British subject," I said then, "and I have demanded no more than my rights. I have been treated like a dog and shut up in this filthy place to be starved into submission to that ruffianly bully. Go through with it if you dare. I can keep my end up, and be hanged to you all. But if I'm left to rot here, there'll be questions which somebody will find it difficult to answer. You can't murder Englishmen with impunity. You know that."

He shrugged his shoulders, hesitated whether to answer, then decided not to and went away.

A couple of hours later I was taken again to be examined, and the man who had visited me was with the bully.

"Is your name Robert Anstruther?" asked the latter.

"You knew that before you sentenced me to twenty-four hours' starvation."

"Are you prepared how to explain your part in this business?"

"What business? What do you charge me with?"

His colleague bent and whispered to him; and a

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short but very heated altercation followed, which resulted in the bully ordering the other man out of the room.

Then he turned to me. "You'll have to answer me."

"We shall see about that," I returned with a grin. "I shall gaol you till you do."

"Then we shall both be a good deal older when we meet again," I retorted.

"You have a fancy to try a change of prisons?"

"I demand to see the British Consul and to be allowed to communicate with my friends."

"Your friends, now. Who are they?" he sneered.

"One will do to start with. His Excellency General von Eckerstein of the German Legation at Petersburg. I wish him to know that you have tried to starve me to submit to your infernal bullying."

"Insolent English beast," he roared, completely losing his head in his fury. "Take the liar away."

"I shan't always be a prisoner," I cried, as the man seized me. "But I shall remember that insult until I've made you swallow your words." I was nearly as furious as he; but I had no time to say more, for the men took their cue from him and hustled me violently out of the room.

They passed on word that I might be ill treated with impunity; and I had a very rough and tumble time indeed while being carried to one of the gaols.

With the minor police and gaol officials in Rus-

sian Poland, the ill-treatment of prisoners is a carefully studied art; and they amused themselves congenially with me. Twenty times on that short journey I had to put the greatest restraint on myself to resist the temptation to do what they strove to goad me to do—to commit some act of violence which would have given them the excuse they sought to half batter me to death.

As it was I was hustled, struck and kicked; my clothes were nearly torn off my back, and every foul epithet which Russian and Polish malice could think of was spat at me with official brutality and contemptuousness.

I kept my head, however. I was tough enough to bear a good deal of ill-treatment; I had often taken much worse punishment in the boxing ring, and I had played football in America; so I held my temper back for the man who was the real cause of it all.

They flung me at length into a cell and locked the door upon me with a last gibe that the English were dirty cowards, and I the meanest skunk of them all.

I understood that day how men are made murderers. I brooded over my wrongs and nursed my rage against the bully who was responsible for this treatment, until if we had stood face to face I know I should have found delight in dragging him down and choking the life out of him. A fierce desire to fight him and punish him took possession of me; and for an hour or two hunger, thirst, injustice,

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everything was forgotten in that all but insane craving for revenge.

But rage cannot last for ever and when some rough prison food—gruel, black bread, and a pan-kin of water—was thrust into my cell an hour or two later, the sight of it re-roused my hunger and blanketed my passion. So famished was I by that time that I had to clamp down the desperate impulse to cram it into my mouth with the unbridled voracity of a starving beast.

It was excellent self-discipline to eat it slowly. But I succeeded. I took it, just a mouthful at a time, with long intervals between, thus spreading out the meal over perhaps two hours or more. And at the end of the time I was myself once more, had regained my self-restraint, and was able to think.

What they meant to do with me, I could not see; but what I would do was clear enough. I would conform to every rule of the prison life and wait for the chance of communicating with my friend or with the British Consul. Let that bully break down my resolve, I would not, if I had to stay in the prison till I was grey. And when my time came I would have a reckoning with him, even if the immediate result was only to bring me back to the prison with a real crime for the reason.

On entering the gaol I had been searched, and my watch and money, everything, indeed, taken from me. I could not, therefore, try the bribery trick again, even if the chance had offered. So I made the best of a very bad job, arranged my torn clothes

in such fashion as I could, rubbed the bruises where the brutes had kicked or struck me, and got all the sleep that was possible.

The attempt to starve me was abandoned, and later in the day another meal, black bread and water this time, was served. I was left to myself that day and the whole of the next, except when the food was brought, or when I was ordered roughly to clean the cell, or when a warder in the corridor would open the grill in the door and after grinning at me would utter some vile epithet. They were a genial pleasant set of men.

On the third day, however, a fresh course was attempted. A man I had not seen before entered my cell, and after very little preface hinted that if I would pay him, he would carry some communication to my friends. Suspicious that it was a trick, I declined; and then he urged me to make a full confession of all I knew and submit to the authorities.

"What do you call this but submitting?" I retorted. "I don't see what other course is left to me. But I have done nothing, and have no confession to make therefore."

"By submission I mean answer the questions of Colonel Bremenhof."

"Is that the man who interrogated me?"

"Yes. Will you not confess to——"

"I have no confession to make," I cut in. "But I'm glad to know his name. I shan't forget it."

He tried to work on my fears, then. This was

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not England, the times were troubled, military laws prevailed, and suspects who would not account for themselves might be treated very harshly.

"I have had ample proof of that myself, thank you," said I, drily; "and as soon as I am free, I shall see that some others learn to spell the word."

He gave me up then and left with a curt warning. "You will not be free until you have submitted."

It began to look as though it was to be trial of staying power; and I had all that day and half the next to ponder his warning.

Then something happened.

I had had my midday meal and was trying to sleep when I heard the shuffling of steps and the murmur of voices in the corridor.

There was a pause, the key was thrust into the lock, the door thrown open and two warders entered followed by the bully and, of all people in the world, the least expected—Volna.

CHAPTER XVI

I GET A BIT OF MY OWN BACK

AT the sight of the man who had used his official power to give me the lie and then have me treated like a felon my rage flashed at once into a flame.

But for that, my astonishment at seeing Volna would have drawn some sign of recognition before my instinctive caution could have prevented it. As it was, however, my gaze fastened on Colonel Bremenhof.

"It's you, is it?" I said, and I jumped up and stepped toward him.

He retreated, and the two warders interposed quickly and pushed me back. But the incident had served a purpose. It prevented the bully's noticing Volna's start of dismay on recognising me.

"That's right," I sneered. "Keep your bulldogs about you. It's not safe to come near me without some one to take care of you."

His anger and chagrin were intense. I knew afterwards what he had hoped to gain by bringing Volna to my cell; and the failure of the plan galled him.

"This is the fellow, Volna, who was found with your uncle——" he began, when I broke in.

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"Have you communicated with my friend General von Eckerstein?"

"Silence, prisoner," he cried, angrily. "Now, Volna, I want you——"

"Am I a show for all Warsaw to see? I have suffered your brutality——"

"Silence, I say. Disobedient scoundrels get the lash here."

I sneered and shrugged my shoulders. "You miserable coward; a mere cur in office, barking only when you think it safe."

This had the infuriating effect I wished. He lost control of himself, and, pushing the two warders aside, he rushed forward with hand raised to strike me.

I let him come quite close, and then hit him full on his insolent mouth, putting all my weight and strength behind the blow. He went down like a ninepin, and so far as he was concerned, the interview was over.

A pretty considerable row followed. The two warders threw themselves on me and shouted lustily for help. Others rushed to the cell in a ferment of excitement and clustered between me and the bully, much as though I were a wild beast. He was carried off, and Volna, in a maze of distress and consternation, was taken away at the same time.

I was now considered to be a desperate and dangerous prisoner. Handcuffs were placed on my wrists and irons on my legs, neither of the operations being gently performed.

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But I did not care. I had got back a little of my own from the brute, and they might do what they pleased with me now. What that would be, I was soon to learn.

I was huddled up on my pallet in the exceedingly uncomfortable position which the irons permitted when the governor of the gaol and a couple of other officials entered with some warders.

He read me a short lecture upon the heinousness of my awful offence, told me that men had been killed who had done less, and then announced that my punishment would be the knout. Three hundred lashes to be administered at intervals of a week, a hundred lashes each time.

"I am an Englishman, and claim the right to communicate with the British Consul, and also my friend, General von Eckerstein."

"You don't dare to deny that you struck Colonel Bremenhof?"

"My quarrel is personal with him. He sent me here in the first instance without any cause and was going to strike me just now when I hit him."

"Enough," was the stern reply. "You have admitted your infamous act. The first portion of your punishment will be administered to-morrow;" and with that he turned on his heel and left me to my own reflections.

They were gloomy enough. I had once seen a man knouted, and had winced as the lash tore the flesh from the poor devil's back. I would rather

have been sentenced to be shot at once; and for a few mad moments I indulged in wild thoughts of self-destruction or of attempting a fierce attack on some one in the prison which would bring a capital sentence.

Sanity returned presently, however, and after a time the extraordinary circumstances of Volna's visit began to claim my thoughts.

What baffled me as much as anything was that Colonel Bremenhof had addressed her by her Christian name. What could he be to her, or she to him? He had evidently brought her to the prison to identify me; but what could be his motive? Could she have fallen under suspicion? What did he know, and how had he guessed that she and I had been together? Had she been confronted with the police agent of the Devil's Staircase incident? Was she to be charged? That did not seem possible in view of the fact that she was apparently free and he had spoken to her as to a friend.

I raked my wits over and over again in repeated attempts to answer these questions, only to give up the puzzle as hopeless.

No one came near me again all that afternoon and evening, and as the hours passed, the thought of what was in store for me on the morrow became more and more oppressive. And when, at length, I heard the warders going their night rounds, I am free to confess I was very close to despair.

I dreaded the lash as fully as any poor devil who was ever sentenced to it deservedly; and I found

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myself speculating, with a coward's fear, upon the gruesome ordeal.

I could not sleep for the shuddering horror of the thing. In vain I told myself that men had gone through it before, and that what they had endured, I could probably endure. There was no consolation in that. The one thought that did afford me a gleam of grim comfort was that if I did get through it and was ever free, Colonel Bremenhof should taste something of the horrors he had caused me to endure before I would call my account with him square.

There was a great deal of the brute in me in those lingering hours of despair.

I was still in this mood of self-torturing apprehension, trying vainly to get to sleep and shake off the horrors of it when my cell door was opened and two warders entered. By the lantern which one carried I saw two other figures in the gloom beyond, and I jumped to the conclusion that the time for my knouting had been put forward.

"This is the prisoner." I recognized the governor's voice.

The warder's lantern flashed to my face, and out of the gloom came a sonorous "Good God!" Then some one rushed forward and took my hands. "My dear boy, what in the name of heaven and earth does all this mean?"

It was my old friend, General von Eckerstein; and as I felt the grasp of his hands I closed my eyes with a deep, deep sigh of intense thankfulness.

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"There has been a bad mistake, that's all," I said, scarcely knowing what I said or did for the moment. The sense of relief was so intense as to be almost overpowering. I found myself laughing fatuously.

"This is your friend, General?" asked the governor.

"Why, of course it is. It's the most extraordinary thing in the world. Why on earth didn't you send for me before?"

"I tried to, but—I had better explain everything."

"He has proved himself a very dangerous and desperate man, General," said the governor. "Will you answer for him?"

"Answer for him? Yes; with my life, man. Can you let me see him privately? I'm lost in amazement."

"Take off his irons," ordered the governor.

"Fettered, too. Heavens! what would your father have said?"

The irons were taken off and I was allowed to go with the General to one of the governor's rooms where we were left alone. This gave me time to regain my self-control.

"Now perhaps you'll tell me all about it," said my friend.

"Two things first. Give me a cigar, and tell me how you have come from Petersburg just in the nick of time."

"From Petersburg? I have not come from Petersburg; I am in Warsaw for a time. But what

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do you mean? You knew that when you sent me this."

He handed me a letter as follows:

"DEAR OLD FRIEND,—

"Come to me at once to the Kreuzstadt fortress. I am a prisoner. For God's sake.

"ROBERT ANSTRUTHER."

"I cannot write this myself, but do not fail me."

His shrewd eyes were fixed upon me as I looked up. "Umph! Who's the woman?" he asked. I hesitated and smiled as I laid the letter down, and, to fill the pause, lighted my cigar. "Don't," he jerked. I started; for the warning came so pat on my thoughts of the best tale to make.

I looked across and met his keen, penetrating gaze.

"Young Bob Anstruther, if you try and lie to me I'll throw up the whole thing. Trust me with the truth, and I'll do for you what your father's friend should."

"The secret is not mine and——"

"Devil take the boy," he burst in vehemently.

"Don't I love John Anstruther's son like my own child, or do you think an old diplomat gabs and blabs like a washerwoman? Confound you, do you want to make me give you my word of honour, you young idiot?"

I hesitated no longer, but told him the whole story from the meeting with Volna at Bratinsk rail-

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way station down to that moment, omitting only the part which referred to Father Ambrose and the Fraternity signals.

"The portion I don't tell you doesn't affect my case, General; and I am under my pledged word not to reveal it."

"You've told me about enough," he retorted grimly; and for a while we sat and smoked and looked at one another in silence.

Presently, with a short laugh, he took his cigar from his lips. "You're a hot-headed young fool, Bob, just that and nothing more. But"—he paused, brushed back his grey hair, sighed, and then smiled—"I suppose at your age I should have done pretty much the same, and I'm cock-sure your father would."

"I'll take my gruelling, sir, if it comes to it."

"Don't talk nonsense, boy. Do you think I'll let 'em touch you? But we must move very warily. Will you apologize to Colonel Bremenhof?"

"I'll see him hanged first," I cried.

He grinned and nodded. "You mean to make it as stiff for me as you can. That's always the way with young folk."

"Would you have me apologize to him?"

His face stiffened and his eyelids came together till they were mere slits through which his pupils gleamed. "I'm glad you hit him; although that blow is just the toughest nut to crack. But we must get to work. Thank Heaven, he put himself in the wrong as usual."

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He rang the bell and sent for the governor. His manner became suddenly as stern as with me it had been kind.

"There has been a very serious miscarriage of justice here, Major Pruladoff. This is Mr. Robert Anstruther, the son of a man who was the intimate friend of half the Berlin Court and trusted by the Emperor. His imprisonment is nothing short of an outrage, and what makes it really serious is that his demand, made as his right, to see the British Consul and to communicate with me, was refused."

"I know nothing of that, of course, General. He was brought here on the order of Colonel Bremenhof."

"Oblige me by calling him up on the telephone, and let me speak with him."

Some minutes passed before the governor announced that the Colonel was waiting. My old friend went to the instrument.

"Is that Colonel Bremenhof? This is General von Eckerstein. I wish to know why, when the young Englishman, Robert Anstruther, was brought before you, you refused to allow him to communicate with the British Consul and with me, his friend? What's that? That does not answer my question. By what right did you refuse? What's that? I can't hear you. Oh, your mouth is swollen and you can only speak with difficulty?"

This was for my benefit, I knew, and I would have smiled if Major Pruladoff hadn't been frowning grimly at me.

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"You can give me a direct answer all the same," continued the General at the instrument. There was a pause, filled by the insistent buzz of the voice replying. "That is no reason. You know that, sir. What? Well, you can't treat Englishmen like that. It will be my countryman's turn next. But you had his papers. Very well, then, I am going now to the governor. Yes, of course I will, as for my own countryman, as my own son, in fact. Nonsense. What your men thought doesn't touch the point of your refusal. You know that. Well, if you don't think the thing had better be hushed up, there's an end of it. Mr. Anstruther will communicate with the Consul here and wire to the Ambassador at Petersburg. What do you mean? Do you dare to try and make me a party to your illegal act? Then you shouldn't suggest it. Certainly. If you don't send down an order for his release I shall not exert any further influence to restrain Mr. Anstruther from using his unquestionable rights, and shall myself wire to the Minister of the Interior. An hour. No, sir, not five minutes. At once!" and the General hung up the receiver.

The telephone bell rang furiously.

"Just write a short note to Mr. Hardy, the Consul, Robert, and I'll take it to him myself. He will at once communicate with Petersburg and in the meantime I'll wire to the Minister. You'll permit the letter to be written, Major?"

The bell was going all the time.

"I am in a difficult position, General," replied

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the governor. "That is probably Colonel Bremen-hof. Won't you answer?"

"Certainly not. You'd better ask him if he persists in his refusal; and you may add it doesn't matter, because I shall see Mr. Hardy."

"The Colonel wishes to speak to you again, General," said the Major from the instrument.

"I have no more time to waste over the telephone;" and my friend put on his overcoat. "You must go back to your cell, Robert; but Mr. Hardy is a prompt man, and before morning we shall have word of some kind from Petersburg. Good-night, boy;" and as he shook my hand he winked.

"General von Eckerstein is going, Colonel," said the governor through the telephone. "The Colonel wishes to know where you are going, General."

"Tell him to mind to his own business and I'll mind mine," was the angry reply, and it was repeated over the wire.

The General walked to the door and opened it.

"The Colonel urgently begs you to speak with him, General."

"Am I to wait for that letter to be written or not, sir?" His face might have been a stone mask in its sternness.

"Please wait a moment, General. As a personal favour to me. I really don't know what to do."

"I have no more time to waste, I say. I demand a reply now."

"Mr. Anstruther, will you ask the General? It may be of the highest moment to you."

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A very different sort of governor this from the one who had lectured me so sternly in my cell, and then glibly sentenced me to the knout.

"No. I have been treated too infamously. I prefer to put the matter in the hands of the British authorities," I answered. "All Europe shall know how foreigners are treated in Warsaw."

A glance from the General approved my reply.

"You can write to your Consul, then." We both understood that this was merely intended to gain delay, and we wasted some time in pretended difficulty about phrasing the letter, while a conversation continued over the wire which clearly showed the man at the other end was in trouble.

"That's enough, Bob," said the General presently. "You can tell him all when he comes."

"Thank Heaven," breathed the governor with a sigh of relief as the receiver was hung up again.

"One moment, General. The Colonel is sending an order for Mr. Anstruther's release upon your giving me your assurance to be responsible for him."

"Just in time," exclaimed my old friend, curtly and ungraciously, as he tore up the paper, on which, by-the-bye, I had not written a line. "And about that infernal knouting?"

"The affair is now out of my hands;" and the governor gave another sigh of relief.

Half an hour later the order arrived, and we left the prison together.

CHAPTER XVII

"DO YOU LOVE VOLNA DRAKONA?"

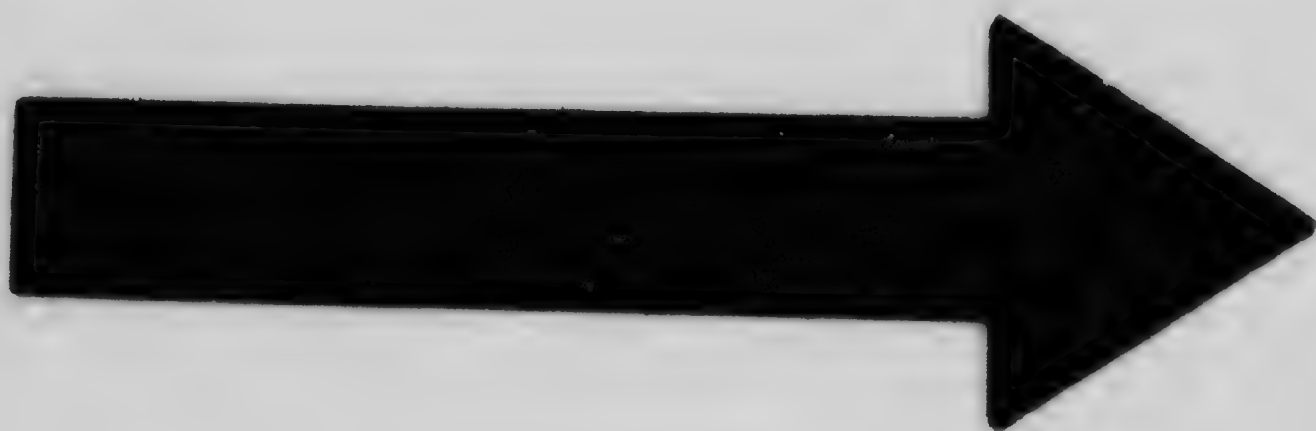
THE next day I did nothing except fit myself out with some new clothes, and speculate about my future course.

I could not decide anything until I saw the General; and before I rose he had gone out and had left word for me to wait in the house for him.

After the harrassing uncertainty of my spell in prison, the scene with Bremenhof on the previous day, and the disturbing ordeal of the crisis it had produced, the mere rest and sense of security were indescribably welcome.

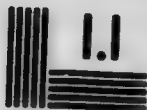
I had plenty to think about, of course, but it was more like floundering speculation than consecutive thought. How Volna had returned to Warsaw? What was behind her visit to the prison? What the connection was between her and Colonel Bremenhof? What his motive could be in bringing her to the prison? Whether she had fallen under suspicion? How was I to set about ascertaining the truth? How to find means of seeing her again? With no facts to guide me, I could not answer the puzzling questions which suggested themselves thus readily.

"I have settled your matter," said the General when we were closeted together in the evening.



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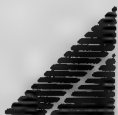
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"Here are your papers, passport, and letter of credit; and I have succeeded in making Colonel Brehmhof understand that the affair with him had better be regarded as a personal quarrel. I have pledged my word for you—that you are no more a revolutionary than I am; that in anything you may have done, you were just a tool in others' hands."

"That's rather rough on the 'others,'" I protested.

"There will be an opportunity given to you, the day after to-morrow, to say all you know about the partner of your flight from Bratinsk."

"It will be devilish awkward," I murmured.

"Better than three hundred lashes, isn't it?" he returned drily. "But you don't see the point. The day after to-morrow."

"One day is just as awkward as another."

"You're not as sharp as your father, Bob."

"Sons never are," I agreed, with a grin.

"He'd have known what to do with a day and a half's grace, and a passport put back in his hands."

"Oh! You mean I should bolt?"

"Are you going to make an egregious young ass of yourself again?"

"It looks like it to you, no doubt," I said, a little sheepishly.

"Umph. There's a train west at midnight."

There was a long pause. "Do you think my father would have bolted?" I asked.

He pursed his lips and frowned. "Is she so much to you?"

"She is the one woman in the world to me."

He appeared to expect the answer and yet to regret it. "Then, of course, you'll stay. You see what it means?"

"I don't care what it means."

"I've got you out of this mess, but if you give Bremenhof another chance against you, you'll have to shift for yourself. I shall be powerless to help you. I can't tell you official secrets, but I may warn you that we are face to face with events the results of which no man can foresee. It may spell revolution and bloodshed; and to be even a suspect then will be full of hazard and peril."

"The more reason for me to stop."

"Bremenhof has already great power, and if a crisis comes, he will have a free hand. He hates you,—not only for what you have done to him, but for another reason. Volna Drakona is betrothed to him."

"To that brutal bully? I can't believe it."

"I know what I say. If he gets half a chance at you, you'll feel his hand. Take my advice and go." He was very earnest.

"Not for fifty infernal Bremenhofs," I cried passionately.

He flung the end of his cigar away and rose. "That's your last word? It may prove a serious mistake for the girl's sake."

"My last word—absolutely."

A half quizzical smile relieved the earnestness of his look for a moment. "I believe you'll make an

awful mess of things, Bob; but it's glorious to be young. If I can help you, I will; but——" a shrug of the shoulders and a toss of the hands finished the sentence, as he turned away to his desk.

I bade him good-night a few minutes later and thanked him again for his help.

"Sleep over it all; perhaps it will look different in the morning and you may be able to see how your staying can help the girl. I can't." Then with the same kindly, half-quizzical smile he added: "But then I'm only a thin-blooded old cynic and you're a pulseful young fellow in love. A tremendous difference, Bob. Eh? Tremendous."

Sleep over it I did not, at least for some hours; but worry over it I did certainly, tossing and turning restlessly until near the dawn; striving to understand this new complication of Volna's betrothal to Bremenhof.

If he knew or suspected that I had helped her at Bratinsk, I could understand his treatment of me. A beast by nature and a bully by official opportunity, if his jealousy had been roused it was quite likely to render him the brute he had shewn himself to me. It would explain his having brought her to my cell. He had probably wished to confirm or dissipate his suspicion that Volna had been my companion in the flight. Yet he could have done that in a moment by confronting her with either of the police agents. Why had he not done that?

Puzzling over this question I stumbled on what might possibly be the key. He might wish for

private reasons to convince himself and yet be unwilling to do this officially. If the police agents recognised her, he might be unable to shield her from the consequences of her act.

This gave me another idea. If he was afraid to have Volna publicly and officially identified, I saw how to bluff him. I could demand to have my examination a strictly official one; and so outplay him.

His object was now to frighten me away from Warsaw by threatening to have me examined as to my part; but if I could convince him that I meant that examination to end in the public identification of Volna, he would be as loath to hold it as I was to face it.

But I must first satisfy myself of the facts behind this betrothal. I recalled her reference to an entanglement; but I laughed at the notion that she cared for him. Yet how could I get at the truth?

This question was still unsettled when I rose the next morning; and then Fortune did me a good turn and put the answer in my reach.

The General looked a little troubled when he met me. "I have had a telephone message about you, Bob. From Count Ladislas Tuleski."

I beamed. He was the very man to tell me all I wished to know. "He's one of my best friends, General. He saved my life a couple of years ago in the Alps at the risk of his own. It's a stroke of luck if he's in the city."

"There are two kinds of luck, so that may be

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true. He had heard you were here and wants to see you."

"Not half so badly as I want to see him."

"You know he is one of the Fraternity leaders?"

"He's the gentlest soul in the world and wouldn't hurt a fly."

"If you go to his house under the circumstances, it will be looked upon as suspicious; to-day of all days in the year. I warn you."

"Why to-day?"

"I forgot you had been in prison for nearly a week and don't know the news. Every eye in Russia to-day is waiting on events in Petersburg. The strikers are going to the Winter Palace to petition the Czar, and if bloodshed follows, as seems inevitable, it may spread over the whole Empire."

"What has that to do with my seeing my friend?"

"You are playing with words, boy," he answered sternly. "He is a leader of this movement; you are half suspect now; and if the trouble we fear comes, you will give Bremenhof the chance he seeks against you."

"I am not afraid of Colonel Bremenhof. I have some questions to ask Ladislas that cannot wait."

"I can only warn you, of course, but if you were my son, I declare to God I'd put you under lock and key to stop this madness," he burst out almost fiercely.

His vehemence seemed to me quite unwarranted

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and all out of perspective. "I shall come to no harm, sir."

"You don't see what you are doing, boy. It is madness—nothing short of it. Remember my warning when the trouble comes, as it certainly will," and he turned away.

"I am sorry to anger you, sir; but I fear I haven't made you understand all that this means to me. I value your friendship and, believe me, I would take your advice now if I could. But all I care about in the world is concerned in this, and I must find out the truth."

He turned, paused, appeared to hesitate, and then shook his head. "No, I will be no party to foolishness of this kind. I must not. You are taking a risk you don't or won't understand;" and he left me.

I knew that real solicitude for me was at the bottom of my old friend's anger and I was genuinely sorry for the misunderstanding which had arisen; but I could not listen to his counsel. Find out the truth about Volna's betrothal I must and would; and short of going to Volna herself for it—an obviously impossible course—to see Ladislav was the only thing to do.

As I hastened to his house I perceived one thing, however. I could no longer remain under the General's roof. That might compromise him: and I resolved to write him from Ladislav's house that I should not return.

I found my friend in a condition of excitement

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unusual even with him. He was always impulsive and a slave to the mood of the moment, and I had long ceased to be surprised by his neurotic impetuosity and feverish unrest. It was this very self-regardless impetuosity, indeed, which had led him to offer his life for mine when he had dashed to my rescue in the mountaineering incident which had bound us together in bonds of close and affectionate friendship.

"I had no idea you were in Warsaw, Ladislas," I said, as I gripped his hand, "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you."

He held my hand and wheeled me round to the light as he stared into my eyes. "Let me look at you. Do you come as a friend?"

I should have smiled, but for his careworn, harrassed, eager expression as he put the strange question. "I hope I shall never come to you as anything but a friend."

His black eyes shone for the second he continued to stare at me. Then he dropped my hand, and exclaimed. "My God, I hope so. My God, I hope so; but there are things which turn even friends into enemies;" and he sighed as he thrust his fingers through his hair—he had the head of a poet or musician and wore his fair hair quite long—and began to pace up and down the room. It was difficult for him to keep still at any time; and in moments of unusual excitement he was as volatile as quicksilver.

"It will have to be something serious to turn us

into enemies, Ladislav," I replied. "But tell me what it is you think might do it. I shan't shirk a test, I promise you."

"Ah, you know there is something, then, Robert," he cried, wheeling round abruptly and with quite a suggestion of fierceness. He was the only intimate I had who refused to call me Bob. He considered it undignified, he had once said.

"I only know that you sent for me, my dear fellow, and I can see for myself that you are upset. Tell me."

He started on his walk again and in the pause I lighted a cigar. Five or six times he crossed and recrossed the room, his hands in his hair, in his pockets, and tugging at the lapels of his coat in turn. Then he came and stood over me and fixed his great eyes on mine.

"Do you love Volna Drakona? Answer me; on your solemn word of honour, for the love of God."

CHAPTER XVIII

FOR FRIENDSHIP'S SAKE

MY friend's question came like a clap of thunder in the clear blue of a summer sky, so absolutely startling was its surprise.

In the second's pause before I replied, many of the complicating possibilities involved in it flashed upon me as his burning almost passionate gaze was bent upon me.

I pushed my chair back, rose and gripped his hand. "We must talk this over, Ladislav, as friends."

"Answer me. Answer me," he cried, trying to release his hand. "I must know, before we talk of friendship."

"I will answer you. I give you my honour you shall have nothing but the truth from me; but I must first know all that lies behind the question and all that depends upon it. Come, man, speak out. Don't try to drag your hand away. We are men as well as dear friends; and whatever has to be said or done, must not and shall not break our friendship." I placed my other hand on his shoulder. "Can't you agree to this?"

"Not if you have come between me and her."

"You are unbalanced in your excitement, or you

would never say that to me. Understand what I say. Nothing—mark, nothing shall ever make me other than your friend."

I felt him trembling under my hand; and again he tried to free himself.

"No, Ladislas; I do not let you go until you agree in that. You saved my life once. Do you think I forget? I told you then that if the day ever came for me to pay the debt, I should be glad. Now, what is this girl to you?"

"More than my life. My God, much more. More than even my honour, I believe, God help me."

I steadied myself and spoke firmly. "What is it you ask of me?"

His large expressive eyes lighted with eagerness. "Can you do this for me? Can you give her to me?"

I clenched my hands until the nails dug into the palms with the intensity of my effort for composure. It was the crisis of my life.

"My God, you cannot? You will not? And you pledged your oath. I saved your life; and you are false to your word." He said this rapidly, vehemently, fiercely. Then with a sudden change he flung himself into a chair and covered his face with his hands, crying: "God, God, what a coward I am!"

I resumed my seat and as I faced the sacrifice that was now demanded of me, the old scene flashed vividly into my thoughts.

On a treacherous slope of crumbling rubble not

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thirty feet from the edge of an Alpine abyss, dropping a thousand feet sheer to the rocks below, a young fellow lay on his back, sweat-stained and staring, heels and hands dug desperately into the yielding surface as he measured the inches and reckoned the moments between him and the death yawning just below him. Slip, slip, slip, an inch or two at a time, he slid. Clutch as he would with his bleeding fingers and strain as he did, he could not prevent himself from being carried down, down, down with slow but heart-sickening certainty.

Death seemed inevitable; and as it is better to die quickly than to linger with nerve-racking hopelessness, he had made up his mind to let himself go and get it over, when a cheery call came from above, and the light of hope was kindled once again in his beating heart.

At the hazard of his life another man launched himself on that death slide and, with a courage equalled only by his mountaineering skill, carried a rope to his friend and saved his life just as his feet reached the very brink of the abyss.

I was the clumsy fool who had stupidly jeopardized my life and Ladislav the friend who offered his to save me.

And now Volna was to be the price! He had called for it: had thrown in my teeth the pledge I had given; and had chided me for my unreadiness to redeem it. This the friend whom I had always deemed the type of honour and chivalry! Bargaining for the body of the woman he loved!

In the first bitter moment my soul rose in passion-

ate rebellion against the sacrifice. Nothing in all my life had ever moved me so deeply. To make myself a party to the bargain was to do dishonour to Volna herself. What right had we to take this thing into our hands and settle her life for her? It was for her, not for us, to make a decision so vital to her happiness.

Such a price as this had never been in contemplation. He knew this as well as I. And at that point my memory played me a curious trick. My thoughts flashed back to the moment of cold despair when death lay gaping just below me on that mountain slide; to the dazzling change to hope at the sound of Ladislas' cheery call of encouragement. I saw him again working his way toward me, death the certain penalty of a single unskilful step; and once again the warm glow of gratitude for the dauntless courage and devotion which had prompted my pledge then, came back in all its force now.

It ended the struggle. I would pay the price, let the cost be what it might.

I sighed heavily and turned to find him leaning forward watching me intently and waiting, as though he divined the struggle that was rending me.

I smiled. "I won't pretend that it hasn't cost me a struggle, Ladislas; but it's over: and we can still be friends."

"How strong you are!" he exclaimed.

"You wouldn't think there was much strength in me if you knew the bitter things I was thinking just now of you."

"You love her, then?"

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"I can't help that—but I can trust myself for the rest. Would to Heaven I had known before this had happened at Bratinsk! So little did I suspect, I came to-day to ask you the meaning of her betrothal to Colonel Bremenhof."

"It is an awful mess!" he exclaimed, and began pacing the room again. "Count Peter arranged that. It was a blind to keep the Drakonas from being suspected. Volna consented for her mother's sake; but she was candid, telling the man she did not care for him. She is as true as a crystal. Her sister and brother—do you know them? No?—they fed him with lies and blinded him; all at the Count's instigation."

"Well?"

"Bremenhof is a devil for cunning. He was not deceived; and he saw at once that his hold over Volna was her fear for her mother. So he wormed and moled and got a case against the mother; and now he swears that if the marriage does not take place at once—to-day or at latest to-morrow—he will have the mother arrested, and Volna, too."

"You know of my affair with him?"

"Volna told me you struck him. He took her there to satisfy himself privately that she had been at Bratinsk; and have that to hold over her."

"Why have you let her stay at Warsaw?"

"Count Peter was bringing her to Cracow to be married to me."

"Married to you! I don't understand. Were you secretly betrothed?"

"No, no. She had no thought of it, until Count Peter told her at Bratinsk. But she knows how I love her; and we should have won her to consent."

I remembered her statement to me at Bratinsk; that she had meant to escape and return to Warsaw. But I kept this to myself.

"And now?"

"She is changed. It is you who have changed her. She can scarcely be kept from breaking with Bremenhof. I don't know what to do. My God, I don't know what to do."

"It's plain enough. Take her and her mother away from Warsaw."

"How can I go, man? In Heaven's name, how can I go? We are on the eve of the most glorious crisis in our country's history; and we leaders dare not leave our posts."

"Send them away then in some one else's care."

"Why? This city is the safest place in all the Empire for them. To-day the great demonstration at Petersburg will show the Czar and those about him and all the world that the people's just demands can no longer be resisted. The power of these tyrants will be shattered against the greater might of the people's will. You know my dreams of old. They are coming true. We are on the eve of the greatest revolution the world has ever seen: greatest in purpose, widest in area, most beneficial in results—and what is greatest of all—to be achieved without the shedding of a drop of blood."

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"A bloodless revolution will be a new thing in history, Ladislas, especially under Russian methods."

"You do not understand and so you doubt. But we know. The army is with us almost to a man. They are of the people, blood of blood and bone of bone in close-knit kinship; and when the hour strikes, the people will rise in every city, town, and hamlet, rise as one man; and at that rising the musket of every soldier will be grounded and not a sword will leave its scabbard. Peace is our watchword; peace our method; peace and brotherhood our end."

"It is not only Polish independence then?"

"Poland will be free. Poland will lift her head again, a nation among the nations: but all Russia will be free in the gigantic upheaval."

His eyes gleamed with excitement as he strode up and down flinging his arms about; his enthusiasm fired by his own rhapsody. He was very much the dreamer; and he gave the reins to his dream with voluble energy.

"Have you any practical men among you?" I asked, when at length he paused.

"We are all practical. My dear friend, you do not know us."

"True; but suppose you are wrong and that in some places the troops stand by the Government, what will you do?"

"Should we legislate for the impossible?" and he went on with a hundred and fifty unconvincing and inconsequent reasons why nothing of the kind

could occur. "We are offering liberty—liberty, the grandest gift on God's green earth—not only to the people, but to the soldiers themselves. They are not fools, or blind, or idiots to refuse it."

"But your troops here are not Poles, but Russians hating the Poles; and the disposition of the regiments all over the Empire is on the same principle. Do you tell me that national and tribal hatreds are going to be smothered just because a few good fellows like you hold up your hands and cry 'Liberty'? To put it in a nutshell, if you believe this, why are you afraid of what Bremenhof can do in regard to Volna?"

To my surprise and concern he collapsed entirely. He threw himself into a chair and pressed his hand to his face. "Don't, don't," he cried. "You give life and form to the one deadly fear that chills me when I can't suppress it; that haunts me at night like a spectre, and paralyzes me with the agony of its hideous possibilities. I dare not think of it, my friend; I dare not. God, God, I dare not."

I said no more. He was curious material for revolutionary work; but if there were many like him, the Fraternity was a much less formidable body than I had deemed, despite the evidence I had had of its widespread organization.

Presently he roused himself, stood up and apparently with only the slightest effort shook off his depression.

"I didn't mean to inflict this on you," he said,

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with a smile, charming but almost pathetically weary.

My patience was nearly exhausted, however. "What are you going to do to save her?" I asked bluntly.

He shook back his long hair, and smiled. "Tomorrow there will be no more thought or talk of danger."

Just then he was called out, and when he returned a few minutes later, his face was grey and drawn and haggard with anxiety.

"You must take her away from Warsaw," he said.

"I? Ladislav! What do you mean?"

He held up a paper in his trembling hand. "News from Petersburg. The soldiers are drawn up in thousands all over the city there. Guns are posted in all directions; God knows what is going to happen. If there is bloodshed there, hell will break loose here. You alone can save her."

"But, Ladislav, you forget. For me to do anything now——"

He caught both my hands in his agitation.

"You'll do this, Robert? For our old friendship's sake? For her sake? If she stays here, God alone knows what may happen. You must do it. You must. You must." He was almost hysterical.

"But after what I have told you about her and you have implied to me, my position——"

"What is all that compared to her safety? Do you think I would not trust you? Come to the

house with me at once—this instant. Would you leave her in Bremenhof's power?"

"No, no, I cannot go with you. You ask too much. For her sake, no less than mine, you must find some other means," I protested.

"There is no other way," he cried, impetuously and vehemently. "She shall know the truth. I will tell her that you renounce—that—you know what I mean. For God's sake, don't hesitate or it may be too late. At any cost she must be saved; and her family can do nothing. She shall know that you are acting for me. I will explain everything. It is no time for mere scruples or personal feeling. If I trust you, surely you can trust yourself."

I was dead set against the plan: every impulse and instinct protesting, except the desire to help Volna. But that she would be in grievous danger, should there be a rising in the city, was a fact nothing could explain away; and that Ladislas was about the last man in the world to be able to save her in such a crisis appeared no less certain. If anything was to be done, someone capable of taking a practical view of things must do it; and her friends appeared to be a set of most unpractical theorists.

But if I was to do anything, it must be made absolutely plain to Volna that I was acting for Ladislas—to save her for him. Surely a most awkward situation to explain. But he continued to urge me and declared he would leave no doubt in her mind; and at length I yielded, and we started for the Drakonas' house.

CHAPTER XIX

TURNING THE SCREW

EMBARRASSING as my position must have been in any case, it was made much worse by the manner of my reception at the Drakonas'.

Volna's half sister, Katinka, received us; and the moment my name was mentioned, she left me no room to doubt that so far as she was concerned I was a most unwelcome visitor.

She was a complete contrast in appearance to Volna. A slight, wiry, straight-backed, acid-faced, little woman of about thirty, with a pair of lustrous dark eyes so disproportionately large that the rest of the features, except her thin straight lips, seemed to pass unnoticed. She gave me a very frigid bow. "We have of course heard of you from Volna, Mr. Anstruther," she said; her tone implying that what she had heard was by no means to my credit; and before I could reply, she turned to Ladislav. "Has anything happened that you are here?"

It was plain to see that he was not at ease with her. "Where is Volna?" he asked.

"She is out. You have not brought Mr. Anstruther to see her?" That he would be mad to think of such a thing was her meaning.

"I have decided that she cannot safely remain in the city."

"Indeed. Why? Or perhaps I should ask this gentleman. You had no such thought when I saw you last."

"I have had grave news from Petersburg this morning, Katinka."

"Oh, are you going to run away?"

"Of course not."

"Then how can Volna go?" She was a past master in the art of insinuation.

"I have induced my friend here to consent to take her."

Her large eyes opened as if in profound astonishment as she looked first at him and then turned them slowly upon me, and coughed most suggestively. "*You* have done this?" Had she put the thought in blunt words she could not have expressed more plainly her conviction that I had concocted the plan for my own ends and that Ladislav must be blind and mad to consent to it.

"Yes, I have; Mr. Anstruther understands precisely the relationship that exists between Volna and me."

"You mean which should but does not exist between you," she corrected, significantly.

"Anstruther is my loyal friend, Katinka."

"Have I expressed any doubt on that point?"

"Miss Drakona is prejudiced against the English, Robert," said Ladislav, turning to me. He flushed with vexation and appeared anxious to apologize for my reception.

"That is surely my country's misfortune," said I.

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"That is insincere; but being English you of course cannot help it," was the reply, very unpleasantly spoken.

Ladislav very foolishly took this up. "Anstruther is my friend, Katinka," he said warmly.

"I don't see that that affects the sincerity or insincerity of what he says. Mr. Anstruther may as well know that he has caused a great deal of trouble in our family, and that so far as my brother and myself are concerned, we do not thank him for it."

"My remark just now was merely intended as one of common politeness, madam," I said. "I am not glad when I find any one prejudiced against my countrymen. And I am quite sincere in expressing regret if I have caused trouble to any of your family."

Her large eyes were fixed coldly upon me while I spoke and at the end she paused and said—"Indeed!" with a most disconcerting effect.

An awkward pause followed, broken by the entrance of the brother, to whom she introduced me in these terms. "This is Mr. Anstruther, Paul, who has come with Ladislav to induce Volna to run away from Warsaw at a moment when the flight of any one from this house would be a disgrace to the cause of the Fraternity."

As might be expected, the introduction did not please him. "I am not aware that we need the interference of any outsider, sir."

"That is the word—interference," agreed the sister.

"It is nothing of the sort, Katinka," declared Ladislav, brusquely. "I have brought my friend, Paul, to help in getting your mother and Volna into some place of safety until the troubles here are over. He knows all about the Bremen-hof entanglement and all about—er—Volna and myself. He acts entirely at my suggestion and on my behalf as my friend in this matter. You know that if any violence breaks out, the city will be no safe place for Volna or her mother—or any woman."

"I am not going to run away," said Katinka, with placid malice. "But of course Volna will jump at such a chance. Until this last deplorable affair, she was accustomed to listen to *our* advice."

"I see no necessity for it, Ladislav," was Paul's verdict.

"We are of *no* account, Paul. It is not what *we* think, of course."

"Where is your mother?" asked Ladislav.

The question was answered by the entrance of one of the sweetest old ladies I have ever seen. Just Volna, thirty-five or forty years older; but Volna without the spirit and capacity and plucky resource I had seen her shew.

"You are Mr. Anstruther, I am sure," she said, as she gave me her hand with a sweet gracious smile. "I know you by my Volna's description; and thank you from my heart for all you did."

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The brother and sister exchanged looks and shrugs.

"I did no more, madame, than any one would have done in a similar case."

"You saved my dearest child, sir; and a mother's heart knows how to be grateful."

"He wishes to do more now, Madame Drakona; and take you and Volna away from the city until these troubles have blown over," said Ladislav.

An expression of perplexity clouded her face and she glanced doubtfully and nervously toward the other two. "I don't think I understand," she said, weakly. "I should like to go, but——" she stopped, and it struck me she was looking for Katinka's sanction.

"These things are to be settled without regard to what we Drakonass think," said Katinka. "Of course I regard it as indecorous, impracticable, unnecessary and cowardly. But my opinion is not even asked;" and she folded her hands and tapped her foot and assumed the air of an injured martyr.

"It is not my suggestion, madame, but that of my friend, Ladislav here," I said to the old lady.

"I am sure I don't know what to do. I wish Volna were here. Could we go?" she replied; and then a long and at times bitter discussion followed in which I took no part. The dear old soul was swayed first one way by Ladislav and then another by Katinka. Paul's part was chiefly that of echo to his sister, who, I noticed, first settled things for

herself and then put the responsibility upon him; and held up his opinion as final and decisive.

How long the discussion would have lasted and how many bitter insinuations Katinka would have thrown out about me it is impossible to say; but the end came in a fashion that was both dramatic and startling.

Paul was called away to the telephone and when he returned to the room he was ashen pale and intensely agitated.

"There has been a massacre at Petersburg. The troops have fired on the people and thousands have been killed."

A dead silence fell on us all, broken only by a groan of anguish from Ladislas. We looked at one another in silent horror as the realization of what it might mean to all in Warsaw began to force itself upon us.

Even Katinka was awe-stricken and aghast.

We were still under the spell of this strained silence when a maid servant scared and white of face rushed in.

"The police are here, madame, and ask for you," she cried.

An officer followed the girl, and out in the hallway I saw a file of men drawn up.

"Madame Drakona?" he asked.

"I am Madame Drakona. What do you want with me?" asked the old lady, rising.

I noticed that Paul instead of stepping forward to the mother's side remained by his sister.

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"I have to ask you to accompany me to the offices of the Department, madame," said the agent.

"To ask me? I don't understand," she replied feebly. "Katinka, Paul, what can this mean? When do you wish me to go, sir?"

"My instructions are that you accompany me immediately."

"But there must be a mistake. I am sure there must be. I cannot go until I have seen my daughter. She is out. Can I not wait until she returns?"

"Are you sure there is no mistake?" asked Paul; as Katinka crossed to Madame Drakona.

"My instructions are too precise to admit of that."

"By whose instructions do you act?" I asked.

"I cannot answer that," was the reply.

"Do you mean that any charge is preferred against this lady?"

"I have only to do my duty, sir."

I turned to Paul. "Could you not telephone to Colonel Bremenhof?"

Katinka took this to herself. "You hear your orders, Paul," she snapped. Even in that moment her spite predominated.

"I do not need your advice, sir," he said; and this perfectly obvious step was not taken, for no reason apparently except that I had suggested it.

"Can I wait for my daughter to return, sir?" asked Madame Drakona.

"Volna can do nothing," declared Katinka.

"I regret, madame, that I have no power to permit that."

"Can you tell us nothing about the reasons for this?" asked Paul.

"Nothing whatever. I know no more than yourself. I wish indeed that the unpleasant duty had been given to some one else to perform."

"I do not blame you, sir," said Madame Drakona, very graciously, despite her agitation. "I will get ready."

"I must ask you not to be longer than five minutes."

He held the door open for her to leave. Katinka went with her and at a sign from the leader, one of the men followed them up the stairs and remained at the door of the room into which they went. The leader stayed with the rest in the hall.

"What can this mean?" asked Ladislav, aghast.

"A good thing that no one else is on the list," said Paul.

"You must find that a great consolation," I could not help saying. Paul turned on me angrily, and Ladislav held up his hand.

"It will do no good to quarrel," he said. "What is to be done? Do let us try to be practical."

"The man who can tell you what it means is Bremenhof."

"Of course you will go with your mother, Paul?" said Ladislav.

"I see no object to be gained."

"Better ask Miss Drakona," I suggested, drily.

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"Your tone is very singular, sir," declared Paul angrily.

"Far less singular than your unreasoning hostility to me, in which you appear to echo your sister's prejudice."

"Robert!" protested Ladislas.

"You are not here by our wish," cried Paul.

Madame Drakona came in then, and I saw that Katinka had made no preparations to go with the mother.

"Ladislas, you and Mr. Anstruther will stay to see Volna, won't you?" asked the old lady, who was much less distressed than I had anticipated.

"She will be so troubled; and she thinks so much of your advice, Mr. Anstruther. You will stay?"

"Certainly at your wish," I agreed.

"I don't see that this gentleman can do any good," murmured the sister.

"We will both stay, if possible—but one of us certainly," said Ladislas.

"Tell her you don't think this is a serious thing; it can't be really; and I daresay I shall be back again almost before she is home."

"I will tell her," replied my friend.

She kissed Paul and Katinka—both of whom were as unmoved as though she had been going for an afternoon drive—and then shook hands with us. "Volna will rely on you, I know, Mr. Anstruther. Now, sir, I am ready. Be sure and make Volna understand I am not in the least frightened, Ladislas."

That was her last word spoken with a brave smile as she drove away.

As soon as we re-entered the house Katinka opened fire at me. "I think we can do what has to be done alone, Paul."

"Madame Drakona asked us to remain, Katinka," said Ladislás.

"I wish you could believe, madam, that I have no desire except for the good of you all," I put in.

She fixed her eyes upon me and replied slowly, "I wish I could, sir; but you have influenced my sister so much against us that I find it impossible."

"How can you think of such pettiness, Katinka, in face of that awful news from Petersburg," cried Ladislás. "Great God, it passes my comprehension."

"Are you going, sir?" asked Paul.

"No. I am not. I promised Madame Drakona to remain until her daughter returned, and shall do so."

"Of course," agreed Ladislás, pausing a second as he strode up and down the room in great distress. His excitement mounted fast, and his fears of coming trouble in the city, caused by the ill news from St. Petersburg and brought close home by the arrest of Madame Drakona, oppressed him till the burden became almost unbearable.

An hour and more passed in this way. Now and again he would break into fitful heated discussion with Paul and his sister; sometimes he turned to me with feverish speculations about what would

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happen; anything in the effort to relieve the weight of his trouble-laden thoughts.

Two or three times the telephone bell summoned Paul; and each time he returned the three would hold whispered counsel together; to end in the same way, by Ladislav resuming his anxious pacing of the room from end to end.

At last some message more disturbing in the rest came.

"Paul and I must go. I dare not stay," he declared. "You will do what must be done here, Robert. They are waiting for us, and God knows what may happen if we do not go;" and paying no heed to my protests, scarcely hearing them, indeed, he and Paul hurried away.

Katinka and I sat on in grim silence.

I had caught some of the infection of Ladislav's alarm at coming trouble; and my one concern now was for Volna's safety. Even the embarrassment at the thought of meeting her again was dominated by my fear for her; and I waited a prey to very gloomy doubt and anxiety.

She came in not knowing that I was there. She saw only Katinka as she entered with the question, "Where is mother?"

Then she saw me and started back in sheer astonishment. Her eyes lighted, she paled slightly and then the colour rushed to her face and with both hands outstretched she came to me as a week before at the priest's house in Kervatje. "Is it really you?"

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I took her hands. "It is really I."

Then Katinka got up and coughed. "Of course I am not surprised; but it is none the less scandalous, sir, considering Volna's mother has just been taken to prison."

The piteous look of pain and alarm on Volna's face as her hands fell from mine made me wish for the moment that Katinka had been a man. I could then have told her plainly some of the things I thought about her.

CHAPTER XX

DEFIANCE

"**T**O prison? Do you mean that, Katinka?" asked Volna; her tone low and tense.

"Do I usually say one thing and mean another?" Volna turned swiftly to me as if seeking a contradiction.

"Where is my mother, Mr. Anstruther?"

Katinka's large eyes flashed angrily. "Do you wish to insult me, Volna, by appealing from me to this new English friend of yours?"

Volna ignored her save for a gesture. "Mr. Anstruther?"

"I stayed at your mother's request to assure you that she does not think it serious."

"My dear, dearest mother!" A piteous cry of sorrow and pity; and then a change to indignant reproach. "This is your doing, Katinka, yours and Paul's and uncle's; with your miserable plots and schemings and intrigues! And having done the mischief, you were such a coward as to leave her to face the consequences alone. Shame on you! If I had no other cause to hate your conspiracy, your cowardice in this would make me do it."

"Don't be theatrical, Volna."

"If it comforts you to cover your cowardice with

a sneer, do so. I do not envy you the consolation. I should have thought even you would be ashamed."

"I shall not remain to be insulted before a stranger."

"When the truth bites like an insult, I can understand how it hurts to hear it. I shall go to my mother, of course. You will help me find her, won't you, Mr. Anstruther?"

"Of course he will—for Ladislas' sake," said Katinka, turning to deliver her last shot as she went out.

"What does she mean?" asked Volna with a start. "She has so many barbs in her speeches. But it doesn't matter—nothing matters until we find mother. Where do you think they have taken her? How can we find out? Oh, I feel half distracted."

"I think Colonel Bremenhof holds the key," I said, very quietly.

She was bending over a small table and looked up instantly and sharply, hesitated and then replied: "This must be explained. They have told you—about him?"

There was just a suggestion of a challenge in her tone; but the question gave me an opening to make the explanation of my position, which had to be made somehow.

"Oh, yes. Ladislas told me."

"Ladislas?" Surprise and a dash of indignation in the tone.

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"No one could have a truer friend than you have in Ladislás."

To my consternation she broke in with a laugh: "Why do you tell me this?"

"He is my friend also, one of my closest friends. I am under a deep obligation to him. He saved my life—I think I told you—at the peril of his own; and to-day he told me not only about Colonel Brementhof but—but everything."

"Everything?" There was no smile now, but just a steady look.

"You are making me speak rather bluntly. He told me, I mean, how deeply he cared for you and he asked me to remain in Warsaw and come here to try and be of some help to you—as your sister said—for his sake."

A pause of considerable embarrassment for me followed. Then she said merely: "Well?"

I felt very awkward. "I think that's all," I stumbled.

"I suppose I ought to be very much obliged to Ladislás," she said, and dropped her gaze upon the table.

"His idea was that I could have helped your mother and you to get away from the city."

"On your way to England, of course?" she asked, without looking up.

I hesitated. "Yes, on my way to England. Father Ambrose urged me to go to England, you know, as soon as possible; and General Eckerstein also."

"I hope you will have a pleasant journey. Warsaw it just now a very questionable pleasure resort."

"Is that my dismissal?"

She looked up and dropped the formal tone which had hurt me. "I thought you wished to go."

"That is harder still," I said.

She gave me her hand impulsively. "But you don't really think I wish to say things that hurt you. After what you have done for me and what you have had to suffer? Don't go away with that thought, please."

"I don't wish to go away at all, until I have been of some help to you. I wish only to make things plain."

"Oh, then we are not saying good-bye," she explained, drawing her hand from mine again, and smiling; only to change the next moment to earnestness. "Why surely you know there is no one whose help I would rather have than yours."

"For Ladislav's sake," I said.

Her eyes took a half wistful, half smiling expression. "No matter for whose sake. We seem fated to be always on a sort of half false footing to one another. Strangers one hour, English the next, then fellow conspirators, and then after that brother and sister, and now——" She paused, as if at a loss for a word.

"Friends," I prompted.

"Oh, yes, always friends, I trust."

"Then let us try to think what can be done for your mother."

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"My dear mother. I must see Colonel Bremen-hof, of course. Even with you to help me, the way is very hard to see."

"Shall I go to him with you?"

At that moment the door was opened quickly and Colonel Bremen-hof entered.

He was intensely surprised to find me in the room and I think quite as angry. It was Katinka's doing.

"Your sister told me I should find you here, Volna," he said; "but not that any one was with you. Least of all, Mr. Anstruther."

Volna drew herself up and without taking his outstretched hand asked: "Where is my mother, Colonel Bremen-hof?"

"I have come to speak to you about her."

"They tell me you have had her arrested. Can that be true?"

"I wish to see you alone."

"Until my question is answered, I will not speak to you alone; and if her arrest is your work, I will never see you again."

"There are many things to explain. Will you be good enough to leave the room, sir?"

"Will you please stay, Mr. Anstruther?" said Volna quickly.

"Volna, I must see you in private. For your mother's sake. Now, sir."

"If Mr. Anstruther goes, I go," she declared.

His face grew as dark as a thundercloud. "You forget yourself, Volna. Does this gentleman know——"

"That we have been betrothed? Oh, yes. It was Mr. Anstruther who saved me from the police at Bratinsk and afterwards. He naturally has my entire confidence. I know him for a friend, and he was about to start with me now to see you and get the truth from you about my mother's arrest."

"You are making a very unfortunate admission which may very greatly affect him."

I couldn't stand this. "Be good enough to leave me out of the question for the moment, Colonel Bremenhof," I said. "I think I have shewn you that I know how to take care of myself."

"Have you dared to arrest my mother?" asked Volna again.

"Madame Drakona is not arrested at all. Those who are concerned in the matter of this national trouble wish to ask her certain questions which she will, I hope, be able to answer quite satisfactorily."

"What do you mean by you 'hope' she will be able to answer?" was Volna's prompt retort. "I hope that even you would not stoop to the baseness I can read under your words."

"In the absence of certain evidence, Madame Drakona has nothing to fear. That is all," he said, doggedly. "Let us speak of this alone, Volna."

"No!" she cried, with indignant emphasis. "Are you so ashamed of your act that you dare not discuss it? I know what you mean by what you call the evidence against my mother. You used your opportunities here and set your spies to scrape it together and you keep it in your own hands, holding

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it over me to force me to comply with your wishes. You are that kind of man. Now, what is your price?"

It was as easy to see that she was right as that her scorn and contempt struck right home. He changed colour, twisted his beard nervously, glanced at her, and from her to me; and stood baffled, disconcerted, scowling and silent.

"What is your price? Are you ashamed to name it before Mr. Anstruther?" she went on, in the same bitter tone. "On what terms will you consent to put that evidence in my hands? Can you do it? If I should consent to pay the price, what guarantee should I have, not only that you could, but that you would, keep any bargain you made? I should surely need some. I am ready to save my mother. Now, what is your price?" Her face flushed, her eyes shining, her manner eloquent of her contempt for him, she presented a magnificent picture of angry scorn.

He cut a pitiful figure in contrast, as he winced and cowered under her words as under the lash of a knout. He cared for her. There was no doubt of that. But it was this very love which made him suffer then. Hard, callous, cruel, indifferent to the suffering he made others endure, he cringed now under the mental torture she inflicted.

It galled him the more that of all men I should be the witness of his humiliation; nor was I at any pains to conceal my pleasure at his discomfiture.

When she spoke next, her tone was cold, quiet,

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and biting. "You are still ashamed to name it? You would do the thing itself, mean and dastardly as it is; but the mention of it harrows your delicate sense of honour. You are a Russian, and worthy of your country. You have thrown my mother into prison in order to force me to marry you at once. That is the price you will not name aloud; and that is a price I will not pay."

The frown on his face deepened ominously as he muttered. "You are betrothed to me."

"The one thing in my life I am ashamed of. It was a sham betrothal, and you are welcome to the truth now. I was at least honest with you. I told you there was on my side none of that feeling which a girl should have at such a time, and that I was heart free. What I did not tell you was that the betrothal was intended to save those about me from danger at your hand. It served its purpose until to-day, when you have struck this coward's blow. Now, thank God, the truth can be told."

Chancing to glance into a mirror at this moment, I caught sight of Katinka listening, white-faced, in the doorway. At this avowal of Volna's she threw up her hands and hurried away.

"You admit you tricked me?" said Bremenhof between his clenched teeth.

"Call it what you will, I have told you now the truth."

"You understand what this means?"

"I am not afraid of you. Say what you will and do what you will! I will save my mother in spite

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of you. Unless she is set free, your part in this shall be made known. How you have constantly held over me the threat of my mother's arrest; how at my instance you have failed to do your duty—if it was your duty to arrest me—and how you have abused your official power to serve your personal ends with me. You have done your worst now; and have failed. And if justice is not really dead in Russia and we Poles are aught but your serfs, I will see that if we are to be punished, you, our accomplice, shall not escape your share of that punishment."

"My God!" he exclaimed under his breath, abashed for the moment by her magnificent boldness. Then anger rallied him. "We will see," he muttered, and turned to leave.

I stepped between him and the door.

"Let him go, if you please, Mr. Anstruther. Let him do what he dare."

Without even another glance at her he went out.

"Thank Heaven the truth is out at last," she said.

"I wonder you had the courage. What will he do?"

Before she answered, Katinka came in dressed for the street and looking very angry and alarmed.

"You are mad, Volna. I heard you. At such a time as this to speak so. You have placed us all in peril. You should be ashamed. Much you care for your mother!"

"I don't think you can even guess how much,

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Katinka," answered Volna very quietly. "Where are you going?"

"Anywhere rather than stay here after that. You had no thought for Paul or for me, of course. We are not safe another minute. Paul is with Ladislav; I have warned him by the telephone. I congratulate you, Mr. Anstruther, upon the disastrous result of your interference."

"You must not say that, Katinka. This is not Mr. Anstruther's doing; it is my own act, and mine only. But by all means save yourself."

"The police may be here at any moment to arrest us all."

"Then why waste time in staying to reproach me?"

Katinka's great eyes flashed angrily. "Have you taken leave of your senses?" she cried. "You have never been like this before. It is sheer folly and madness."

"I told him no more than the truth," replied Volna; adding after a slight pause: "One of the really delicious moments of my life."

"You purchased your pleasure with the safety of us all. Perhaps that will add to your enjoyment," retorted Katinka, as she hurried out of the room.

"Katinka is eager for national independence, but she does not like it in the family."

"What do you suppose Bremenhof will do?" I asked.

"I don't feel as if I cared at this moment. I am

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just revelling in my emancipation." She threw herself into a chair and leaned back clasping her hands behind her head. "I suppose I did not know myself; certainly I never realized before what a capacity for deep feeling I have. I seem to be waking up. Oh, how I hate that man!"

"I think we should be doing something practical," I suggested.

She sighed impatiently and sat up. "You are shocked because I tell you I can hate?"

"I mean merely that he may send to arrest you; and you should be prepared."

She rose. "If he does I must fall back upon Ladislas."

"Ladislas?"

She crossed to the door, turned, and with a slow smile I had learnt to know well, answered: "Did he not get a promise from you to help me? I should never have dared to do what I have done to-day if you had not been here. But influence like that has its responsibilities, also, you know, and you——" The sentence was interrupted by the servant who rushed in then.

"The police are here again, Miss."

The loud summons at the house door confirmed her ill news. Bremenhof had not left us long in doubt as to what he meant to do.

CHAPTER XXI

A BLANK OUTLOOK

VOLNA appealed to me. "What shall I do?"
"Let us get away if we can," I said.

"Come then. We can leave the house by the garden. But suppose they do not seek me?"

"We can't risk waiting to find out. If not, your maid can call to us."

We hurried to the door leading to the garden, and as we closed it the servant admitted the police at the front.

It was quite dusk and the heavy snow covered the sound of our footsteps as we hurried through the shrubbery to a small door in the high wall which bounded the garden at the end.

As we paused a few seconds on the chance of the servant recalling us, I whispered a warning to Volna. "There may be someone posted on the outside. Let me open it."

She gave me the key and I turned it as softly as the stiff lock would permit. I was opening the door gently when it was pushed quickly, and a man entered and seized Volna by the arm.

"We thought you might——"

Before he could finish the sentence I grabbed him by the throat. Fortunately for us he was a small man and like a child in my hands. I gave him a

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pretty rough shaking and then pitched him backwards into the middle of a wide laurel bush where he lay kicking helplessly, struggling to extricate himself, and gasping for breath to call for help.

Before he succeeded in getting out his first loud cry we were out of the garden, had locked the door upon him, and turned the first corner. We had to run for it, and by good luck there was no one about to notice us in the first two or three streets.

When we reached the main thoroughfare we slackened our pace to a quick walk until we got a sleigh which carried us out of the chance of immediate pursuit.

"Almost like a moment of Bratinsk," said Volna.

"I wish we were there, or anywhere out of the city. We'll change sleighs in a minute." I stopped the sleigh soon afterwards at the door of an hotel, and held the porter in talk while the driver whipped up and left. Then we hurried away in the opposite direction.

"Now where are we going?" asked Volna.

"An old nurse of mine lives in the Place of St. John, No. 17; I shall be safe there until we decide what to do."

"Is it far?"

"Not too far to walk if you think that safer."

"I do, because a sleigh driver can always be found and questioned."

During the walk, evidence of the popular unrest was to be seen on all sides.

"The city is not like itself," said Volna, as we

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crossed the great Square of St. Paul. The place was half filled with groups of workmen engaged in sullen discussion, while numbers of police stood at hand watching. "Sunday evening usually finds every one holiday making."

We paused a moment near one or two of the groups. Everywhere the subject of talk was the same—the massacre at St. Petersburg.

Whenever we paused near any group I noticed one or two men leave it, saunter up to us and scrutinize us curiously. Whether they were police or workmen it was impossible to say.

"You are interested in these matters, friend?" asked one of them.

"All are interested," I answered.

"You were listening?" he returned suspiciously.

"Yes, I was listening."

"There are only two kinds of listeners in Warsaw, sympathizers and spies. Those who sympathize draw close; those who spy had better move away."

"I am a foreigner."

"There are spies of all nationalities."

"I am no spy, but I'll take your advice;" and we moved on.

Almost every street corner had its cluster of men, and always the talk was the same. If the workmen of St. Petersburg were massacred, what could those of Warsaw expect? Were they to go on suffering like sheep? Which was the better, to be slaves for the master's gain, or to be men and resist?

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Two or three times the anger of the strikers took violent form. Men were caught making notes of the names of the talkers, the cry of "spy" was raised, and in a moment fifty hands were outstretched, fifty oaths leapt from wrathful lips, and the victims were hustled, battered, kicked, and sent sprawling into the gutters.

"And Ladislas believed there would be no violence," I said to Volna as we hurried on after one of these episodes.

"Poor Ladislas! But I am frightened for what will happen to-morrow. I have never seen this temper among the people before. How will it affect my mother's case? If there should be any popular outbreak, the difficulty of helping her will be infinitely increased. The friends on whom we could rely at any other time will then be helpless. They are all Poles."

"There is another way to look at it. Bremen-hof's powers will be much greater and he can more safely hold back the evidence against your mother which you said he had. Is he really such a brute?"

"He boasted to me one day, when my mother and I were at his house, that he had it in a private safe, and that it rested with me whether it should ever leave there."

"Umph! A courteous gentleman. Will he use it now?"

"If I know him, he will not until he has given up every hope of carrying his purpose with me."

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"Even after your splendid defiance of him to-day?"

She smiled. "He has that quality which so often wins—patience. I believe he suspected from the first what the object of the betrothal was, and just set himself to rivet the chain until I should not dare to break it. While I was away he threatened my mother that if I did not return at once, her arrest would be used to force me back."

"Well, look at it as we will, he has us tied up in a tangle bad enough to satisfy even him."

"It is not so bad as if his men had caught me just now. He would have been much nearer his end. So long as I am free, I can fight him; but he knows what his power would be if he had both mother and me in his hands."

It was in truth a devil of a tangle. With Madame Drakona in prison, Bremenhof had his hand on the lever which controlled everything; and to get her out seemed hopeless.

"This is the Place of St. John," said Volna, presently. "That is the house, No. 17, across there. I will leave you here. What will you do?"

"I shall go to Ladislav and let him know what has occurred."

"Poor Ladislav! What do you think he can do? You will find him with his hands full of more serious matters than even my troubles."

"Nothing could be more serious in his eyes," I said. "And you, what will you do?"

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"Wait until to-morrow, that is all." She spoke with a rather weary smile.

"That is not the courage that defied Bremenhof. The people may win in the impending struggle, and then everything will be changed."

"They may," she agreed, but with no hope in her voice.

"You don't believe it?"

"There is always hope."

"We may find another way. Nothing is impossible for such courage as you have shewn."

"There is always one way open to me in the last resort."

"You mean?"

She looked up steadily. "What should I mean but surrender?"

"Not that, for God's sake," I cried impetuously.

"Don't think me a coward for naming it. It would take all the courage you think I have. But he knows how I love my mother, and that it would kill her to remain in prison. To-morrow she must be freed at any cost."

"No, no, don't think of that. Think of your own brave words in defying him."

She smiled again. "That is just it. Brave words, nothing else. He knows they were but words."

"I'll find some other way. You'll think differently to-morrow."

She paused and then gave me her hand. "I'll try. If any one can give me confidence you can."

"How shall I see you to-morrow? Is there any risk in my coming to the house?"

"It will be better not. One never knows. I will be in the Square of St. Paul—where the strikers' meetings were—at eleven o'clock. But, remember, my mother must be freed to-morrow at any cost."

"Then I know what I have to do," I answered, confidently, "and I repeat, I'll do it somehow."

As I turned away, having watched her enter the house she had indicated, I could not resist applying the phrase—"brave words, nothing else"—to my own resolve to find some means of bringing Brementhof to terms. I could see no way to make it good, to make it more than mere words intended to encourage her. It looked a sheer impossibility.

Short of calling the man and shooting him for the old insult to me or forcing a father's quarrel upon him, there was nothing I could do, and the utter futility of any such crude plan was too patent to do more than increase my impotent anger.

I was hurrying to Ladislav's house when I remembered that I had had no food for some hours and had nowhere to sleep. So I went to the big hotel, the *Vladimir*, and had dinner and engaged a room, lest Ladislav should deem it imprudent for me to stay with him.

As I sat over my dinner brooding, it appeared to me that the only hope for Volna lay in the success of the popular movement; and after dinner I lingered some time in the streets, intensely interested in the progress of affairs.

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The excitement and general unrest were certainly increasing fast, and the temper of the people was rising. The groups of strikers were growing larger. In some places crowds had gathered, and were openly cheering speakers who no longer took pains to lower their voices. In many places the agents of the Fraternity were busily distributing leaflets embodying the workers' demands. There were many proofs of this growing confidence.

More than once the police and the people came into open conflict; and each time the police were worsted, to the great delight and manifest encouragement of the crowd. Then, as men moved from one spot to another, the idea of a procession was generated; bands were formed and united, and began to parade the streets. And in all places at all times men appeared ready primed to take the lead, all acting together as though the whole work had been carefully prepared and rehearsed.

A blind man could have seen that grave trouble was in the making, and I saw abundant proof that, although such leaders as my friend might counsel peaceful methods, the populace were in that ugly mood which would lead them to laugh at peaceful counsels and to rely on force and violence.

It was a night of such crisis for the city that I was surprised to find the authorities apparently heedless of the rapidly growing peril.

At Ladislav's house, however, I had a glimpse of their plans. There were lights in some of the windows and everything was apparently as usual. A

servant admitted me and when I asked for my friend, he ushered me into the library, saying his master would come to me directly.

Instead of Ladislav, however, a stranger came—a young man, well dressed, courteous, and politely insinuating.

"The leaders of the Fraternity are now in conference and the Count cannot leave them for the moment. Will you join them or can I carry any message?"

He referred to the Fraternity with a sort of secretive suggestiveness; but it nevertheless surprised me that the subject should be mentioned so openly.

"I can wait," I said. "I merely wish to see him privately."

"Let me carry a message. He may be some time. On such a night as this the meeting must necessarily be lengthy. I am in his confidence, his private secretary, in fact," he added, when I made no reply. "And of course, in full sympathy with him in all."

"I didn't know he had a secretary, but you will probably know my name, Robert Anstruther."

"Oh, are you Mr. Anstruther? Yes, indeed. I am glad to meet you, if you will allow me to say so. You have probably come to see him about——?" He paused as if inviting me to finish the sentence.

"Well?"

He laughed pleasantly. "You will think it very stupid of me, but in the multiplicity of things which

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in this crisis in the city have crowded upon me, I have lost the clue. Let me think;" and he put his hand to his forehead as if in perplexity.

He was evidently a very sharp, clever fellow, but it struck me that his sudden forgetfulness was a little overacted.

"I am not surprised you can't remember it," I said with a smile intended to be as frank and pleasant as his.

A quick glance from his keen eyes, not intended for me to notice, put me further upon my guard.

"That is very good of you. But I take it what you have to say is for the Count's own ears?"

I looked steadily at him a moment. "I am thinking where I have seen you before," I said, preparing to make a shot.

"I have not had the pleasure, I am sure," he replied, with another smile; deprecating this time. He had as many different smiles as a woman. "I do not forget faces and should instantly recognize such a friend of the Count as Mr. Anstruther, if we had met before."

"I have it," I exclaimed, banging my hand on the table. "You were in the Police Headquarters when I was arrested and taken there from Solden."

It was a good guess, and his surprise unmasked him for an instant. "What do you mean, sir?"

"That you are an agent of the Department. Your people arrested me as a conspirator and imprisoned me until my friend, General von Eckersstein, explained the mistake. Count Ladislas

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Tuleski and I are old friends, and as the General has advised me to leave Warsaw, I did not wish to go away without bidding my friend good-bye. But I suppose you have raided the house, and made it a trap for any one you think you should suspect. Not a nice trick perhaps, but then our English methods differ from yours. Now, how do I stand? Do you wish to repeat the farce of arresting me?"

In view of the ugly incident with the police agent when helping Volna to escape, I was a great deal more anxious about his reply than my easy smile may have led him to believe.

CHAPTER XXII

POLICE METHODS

WE dallied with the question and I thought he was going to repudiate my suggestion; but after a slight pause his manner became official.

"If you recognize me, there is no reason for further concealment. We are in possession of the house and my object was to learn the purpose of your visit. I invite you to tell it me plainly."

"It is merely personal and private. If I leave Warsaw to-morrow, I shall not have another opportunity to see my friend."

"A mere friendly call? At such an hour as this? On one of the leaders of the conspiracy which is threatening the whole city?"

"It is no novel experience for me to make a statement which at the time is not believed by the agents of your Department and to have the truth proved later."

"Where have you come from?"

"I dined at the *Hotel Vladimir* about a couple of hours ago; since then I have been in the streets."

"Also for private and personal purposes?"

"I am an Englishman and always interested in watching the results of misgovernment. A mere personal interest, of course."

He liked this no better than I intended. "Your visit here to-night is full of suspicion, sir, and the account of your movements very difficult to believe."

"In England such a remark would be treated as an impertinence; but there we manage matters differently, and even police officials speak the language of courtesy."

"This is not England," he said with a sneer.

"Thank God that at least is true. But all the same, need we ruffle one another's tempers? I am ready to do what you wish, I can't help myself, of course."

"What is your address?"

"The night before last I was a guest of your Department in the fortress of Kreuzstadt. Last night I stayed at the house of my friend, General von Eckerstein. To-night I meant to ask Ladislav to put me up; and to-morrow I might be on my way to God's country once more. As it is, I shall return to the *Hotel Vladimir*, unless of course you have any——" and I waved my hand to indicate that he might like to finish the sentence.

"My instructions are to send all who come to this house to the Department. One of my men will accompany you."

"I am ready," I answered, curtly. "It is a pity you did not act on your instructions before and save time, instead of trying to trick me into admissions."

"You can make your explanations there, sir, and lodge any complaint you please," he replied;

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and in a few minutes I was on my way to the Department in charge of one of his subordinates.

"You are an Englishman?" he said, after he had been eyeing me very curiously for some time.

"Yes, with no great opinion of your methods of government."

"From London?"

"Yes, from London."

"I have been in London," he answered in excellent English.

"I wonder you ever came back here, then."

"I was some time there, in Soho. It was in London, I suppose, you met Count Ladislas Tuleski?"

"There and in other places. Has he been arrested to-night?"

"No. He would have been, but some one gave him notice that his house was to be raided; and of course he fled." He laughed as though this were a joke.

"Strange how these official secrets get tapped?" I said.

"The Fraternity has friends in many quarters."

"Has it?"

He laughed again, rather drily, this time, and answered with a shrewd glance. "Of course you don't know. Any one calling at the Count's house at such a time would not."

What was he driving at? His manner suggested more than a mere desire to pump me. I made no reply, waiting for him to develop the thing.

"My name is Christian Burski. You may know it," he said next.

"How should I, an Englishman, know the names of the Warsaw police?"

He laughed at this first and then said meaningly, "Not of all the police, of course. But mine is well known."

"Is it? I don't envy you your reputation, all the same."

"Ah, you have no sympathy with the police."

"A kind of sport in which I'd rather be hunted than hunter."

He smiled. "That's good. I like your way," he replied; and then lowering his voice and speaking earnestly, he added: "Is this visit to Headquarters likely to be serious for you? Are you suspect?"

"One would scarcely go to such a place on a night like this from choice, I suppose?" I answered lightly.

"There's a lot of trouble brewing in the streets and it would be easy for a man to get away from a single guard."

After a bribe, I concluded. "Will you smoke?" I asked him and handed him a cigar. We stood to light up and as the match flared between us our eyes met. "Why do you say this?"

"As a peasant farmer, friend," he laughed.

I held the match to his cigar and he pulled at it, keeping his eyes the while on me. "You seem in a hurry," I answered, laughing in my turn.

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"Immediate," came the due response.

"Your name?"

Up went his left hand as he gave me the sign.

"In the eye of God."

I thrust out my hand.

He looked at me steadily and would not take it.

It was proof enough.

"Did you give notice of the raid?"

He nodded. "Yes. If you don't wish to go to the Department, we'll get into one of these crowds; you can knock me over and get away."

I thought quickly. "I don't think it matters. But you can help me in a much more important affair. Have we a friend in Colonel Bremenhof's house—his private house?"

"I am there myself," he answered, with his dry smile.

"Could you get me admittance?"

"No, impossible."

"If I were once inside could you help me?"

"At the risk of both our lives."

"When will you be there?"

"To-morrow, I expect. To-night, the raids on the Fraternity leaders have brought every special among us on duty. To-morrow, the military will be called out."

"If I am not detained at the Department to-night, could you bring me a police uniform to the *Hotel Vladimir*?"

"Yes. One of mine. We are pretty much the same height. By whose orders?"

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"To serve Count Tuleski. There are certain papers in Colonel Bremenhof's safe which we must have."

"Impossible," he said, with a shake of the head.

"He carries the key always; and when he is absent a man is always posted in the room."

"Which room is it?"

"The library. The room at the back of the house on your left as you enter. But there are usually half a dozen men on guard in the house."

"At what time after dusk does the Colonel return home?"

"At six—he dines with his mother and sister."

"If you see me in the house to-morrow you will contrive to be on hand, should any one be called by him. That is all. God keep us all," I said, remembering Jacob Posen's parting salutation at Kervatje.

"God keep us all," he repeated.

We reached the Department soon afterwards and after a short delay I was taken in to Bremenhof, who received me with a half-suppressed, malicious chuckle. My guard, Burski, reported that I had called at Ladislav's house and the explanation I had given.

Bremenhof sent him out of the room. "I scarcely expected to see you here again so soon," he said, when we were alone. "We have another charge waiting for you."

"I can answer any charge."

"Do you wish to communicate with your friends this time?" he sneered. "Scarcely so, I imagine."

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General von Eckerstein pledged himself that you were no revolutionary. Why then did I find you at the Drakonas' house this afternoon; why did you aid the escape of a suspect; and follow it with this night visit to the house of a Fraternity leader?"

I smiled. "You are not alarming me, Colonel Bremenhof. I am no revolutionary. I went to the Drakonas' house because my friend Count Ladislav Tuleski urged me to help him in protecting from you the woman he hopes to marry—Volna Drakona; I helped her to escape when you sent to arrest her; and I went to my friend's house to tell him what I had done."

"The woman *he* is to marry?" he exclaimed with a scowl. Then with a vicious curl of the lip: "So you admit that you helped in this escape?"

"Why should I deny it? You have the proofs. Your man would identify me. You can charge me with the offence, but of course in that case the reasons for the suspect's arrest must be gone into fully. And you see I know them thoroughly."

He saw his dilemma. "I did not say I should charge you, only that you have now committed an act which at such a time of crisis carries serious consequences."

It was my turn to chuckle; but I had more to gain than merely turn the tables on him.

"I have done nothing which I am not perfectly willing to make known publicly anywhere. When I learned my friend's sentiments and hopes in regard to Miss Drakona, my own object was in-

stantly changed. But for his persistence, I should probably have left Warsaw to-day."

This drew a long, keen, searching look on me. "Does Miss Drakona know this?"

"Of course."

"Are you aware of the charges against Count Tuleski? That if made good, they may involve a life sentence, or at least, Siberia?"

"Why do you tell me this?"

"You are shrewd enough to understand, Mr. Anstruther."

"I will not discuss such a question."

"If this matter against you is not pressed, will you leave Warsaw?"

"How can I? I have agreed to be examined to-morrow about the Bratinsk matter."

He waved an impatient hand. "I can arrange that, of course."

"I will go on condition that Madame Drakona is at once set at liberty and the evidence you are holding back is placed in my hands, and that Miss Volna Drakona is absolved from all responsibility for the affair at Bratinsk."

I looked for an outburst of anger at this; but he listened closely and then sat thinking, a heavy frown on his dark face.

"What is behind that?" he asked after the pause.

"That Miss Drakona must be a free agent to become the wife of my friend if she will."

"Free to go to Siberia?" he sneered; "or perhaps you mean to England?"

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"There is an end of the thing. I have no use for a man who doubts my word."

"You forget how grossly I have been deceived already."

I made no reply, but leant back in my chair, crossed my legs, and shoved my hands into my pockets with a great show of unconcern.

"Where is Miss Drakona?" I took no notice.

"Can you communicate with her?" I took a paper from my pocket and began to read it. "If I agree, when will you leave Warsaw?" I made a pencil note on the paper, folded it up and put it away with a sigh of weariness.

"I did not mean to doubt your word. I retract what I said."

"That's another matter. We can resume. Provided you keep faith with me throughout. Then, as soon as Madame Drakona is free and you have handed me the evidence against her and satisfied me that the charge against her daughter is settled, I will go by the next train?"

"On your word of honour?"

"On my word of honour."

He thought for a moment. "You can arrange to leave to-morrow night. There will be certain formalities to settle of course. I will see to them to-morrow. Come to my private house to-morrow at six o'clock and I shall be prepared with everything. Are you still with General von Eckstein?"

"No. I shall stay to-night at the *Hotel Vladimir*."

"You can go. Oh, by the way," he added in a tone of indifference; "your manservant has been brought here with your luggage from Bratinsk."

Something in his manner struck me. His indifference seemed forced. "Is he a prisoner?" I asked.

"Oh, no. Not now."

"Let him bring my things to the *Vladimir*."

He struck his table bell. "This gentleman has been brought here needlessly," he said to the man who came. "He has certain instructions to give about his manservant. See that they are carried out. Good-night, Mr. Anstruther."

I left the message for Felsen, and as I was passing out I saw Burski. He gave me a quick glance of congratulation.

"I am going, you see," I said.

"I did no more than my duty," he answered, for those about us to hear.

"I have no grudge against you. I hope you will always do no less than your duty."

He noticed the equivocal phrase. "I think I can be depended upon," was his equally ambiguous reply.

"Good-night. I am going to the *Hotel Vladimir*."

"It is nothing to me. Good-night."

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I moved off; and just then some one called out—
“Burski, the chief wants you.”

I turned my head at the call; and was just in time to catch his eyes fixed upon me with an expression which set me thinking as I stepped into the street and started for the hotel.

It was a look which suggested that the mask was off in that moment.

Had he been just fooling me?

CHAPTER XXIII

SPY WORK

IT is never pleasant to have to admit even in the secrecy of one's own private thoughts that one has been fooled; nor does the cleverness of the fooler afford any but the coldest consolation.

Yet when I sat down to think things over calmly, I could come to only one conclusion—that in my trial of wits against Bremenhof and his agents I had been woefully worsted.

A little thing will suffice to start suspicion; and in this case it was that strange look which I had surprised on Burski's face.

Once started, however, my suspicions gathered like snow flakes in a drift, and quickly hardened into certainty. Everything seemed to be as highly charged with doubt, as a bomb with dynamite. I could see how I had just played into their hands, like a countryman in the care of a gang of sharpers.

Why should Bremenhof give in about Madame Drakona; and to me of all men? He had cunningly led me to believe that it was because of my changed relations in regard to Volna. But mine were little more than blank cartridges; yet he had waved the white flag the instant I fired one at him.

I could see now how unreal the whole interview had been. He had read my purpose and had just

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played with me, keeping his own plan cunningly concealed. He meant to use me for that plan. What was it? And how did he mean me to help him?

There was the matter of Felsen, too. Why had Bremenhof been at the pains to render me a service? I had not been so dense as not to notice that his indifference in mentioning Felsen was feigned. What object had he in sending the man back to me at such a moment?

I recalled the interview I had overheard between Felsen and the police agent at Bratinsk. The police had brought him to Warsaw now. What had been the relations between them in the interval? Were they going to use him as a spy? It looked very much like it.

Then I thought of Burski and grew hot with shame at the easy manner in which I had let the fellow trick me with his use of the Fraternity signal and pass words, and his offer to let me escape. He had been fooling me of course; and had succeeded with his subtler effort after his superior at Ladislas' house had failed. It was all part of the system of spy work: and by this time Bremenhof knew everything and was no doubt laughing at me and setting the snare which was to complete my overthrow.

Sackcloth and ashes may be hard wearing apparel; but they don't hurt as much as the stings of such humiliation as I felt in realizing my self-satisfied stupidity and the ease with which I had been gulled.

The one redeeming point was that my eyes had been opened before it was too late; and the question was whether I could still get out of the mess into which I had blundered.

I soon guessed the drift of Bremenhof's scheme. It was to ruin me by convicting me of complicity in the Fraternity conspiracy; and in the meanwhile to use me to enable him to find Volna. Felsen was no doubt the chosen spy for the latter part; and Burski for the former.

My first step was obvious. I must not let either man know that I suspected him.

With Felsen this was easy. When he arrived I talked over matters with him; listened to the story of his sufferings on my account; promised him a liberal reward for what he had endured; and did my best to make him feel that he still had my confidence.

With the police agent, Burski, I had to be much more wary. I had already had proofs of his shrewdness; and I found him prepared with an explanation of his call to Bremenhof as I was leaving the Department.

He sent up his name openly, and as the hotel servant was leaving the room he said, with official curtness: "A letter from Colonel Bremenhof."

It was a formal notice that my examination had been postponed.

"We are alone?" he asked in a low voice.

I nodded. "I have only this room."

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He drew a chair close to mine. "We are in luck. You noticed that the chief sent for me?"

"Yes; and was a little surprised."

"A rare stroke of fortune. He suspects you and questioned me closely as to what I had got out of you on the way to police quarters. You know we agents are supposed to trick a prisoner into admissions."

"An infernal system it is, too; but they can't get at me. They had me for nearly a week; but I have friends, and they were forced to let me go."

"You must be careful, friend. You are to be watched and——" Here he smiled very slyly—

"The chief has picked me out for the work. Is not that luck?"

He was evidently pretty sure of me. "I can't quite understand that," I said, as if in doubt. "As a matter of fact I found the Colonel willing to do all I asked." Then I became apparently confidential; that is, I told him just as much as I surmised Bremenhof would have told him already; and referring to the visit to Bremenhof's house, I laid special stress on the fact that Ladislav, as a leader of the Fraternity, had assigned the task to me.

He pledged himself to help and questioned me as to my object.

"Is that all?" he exclaimed, with a shrug of the shoulders when I said my object was merely to get the papers. "He is so hated and feared that I hoped——" here he dropped his voice to a whisper

and looked intently and meaningly at me—"that your orders went farther."

I understood him. "I am an Englishman, friend, and no assassin," I said firmly.

He made as if to conceal a natural disappointment. "And this uniform."

"A disguise to enable me to get the Count's friends away under the pretence of an arrest. But I doubt now if I shall need it."

He paused. "A shrewd plan indeed; but not so far-reaching as I had looked for and hoped. It is best for friends to be frank."

"The Count himself as you know is dead against all violence."

"The time is past for mere talk; we must act," he exclaimed, with an excellent suggestion of suppressed excitement; and he sought to lead me to discuss the affairs of the Fraternity.

"I am not a leader and have only to do the task assigned to me," I said. "Let others do as they will."

"You believe our freedom can be won without violence?"

"I have only to do the task assigned to me," I repeated; and would not be drawn any farther.

As he was going he referred to Felsen. "You trust your servant? You know he is also suspect."

"I know he is a good servant."

"Do not trust him too far. He talks too freely. Be on your guard; and don't let him see this uni-

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form. He will know that I have brought it; and the knowledge might be dangerous to both of us."

It was a clever stroke for one spy to put me on my guard against the other; but my eyes were no longer blinded; and his warning did not mislead me.

I was fully alive to the personal risk I was running, and I spent a couple of hours in very anxious thought, recasting my plans for the next day. In the end I resolved to act as though implicitly believing in Bremenhof's sincerity, and saw how to use one of his own spies to let him know my intention.

In the morning I wrote a note to Volna.

"DEAR MISS DRAKONA,—I am glad to tell you that in an interview I had with Colonel Bremenhof last night he agreed to hand over to me the evidence against your mother and also to place it on record that there is no charge of any kind against you. He imposed one condition; and I shall comply with it by leaving Warsaw to-night. I think it better not to call upon you this morning. Therefore I send this by my servant, Jacob Felsen, who is to be trusted.

"I wish you earnestly, God speed, and shall always be

"Your Friend,

"ROBERT ANSTRUTHER."

I addressed this openly to Volna and gave it to my servant.

"I am going to trust you with a very important

secret, Felsen," I said as impressively and earnestly as I could. "The safety of the person to whom this is addressed may depend upon your good faith. I cannot go to the place myself, but I feel I can rely upon your doing all I look for from you in the matter."

He answered with a hundred protestations of fidelity; and was so over-insistent that I was quite sure he meant to take the letter straight to Bremen-hof, who would either hurry to the house himself or send to have Volna brought to him. He would thus find that I had given the right address and was apparently acting, as my letter implied, in reliance upon his word.

But as I was careful that Felsen did not leave my hotel until it was impossible for Bremen-hof or his men to get to the Place of St. John before Volna had left to keep her appointment with me, I was risking nothing in giving away her real address.

As soon as he was gone I started to meet her. I found Burski in the hall of the hotel smoking a cigar and chatting with some other men.

I concluded that I was to be shadowed and that he was there to point me out to whoever might be detailed for the work.

"Ah, good-morning, Mr. Anstruther," he said, coming up to me.

I stopped and returned his greeting. "What is the news? Is the trouble over?"

"No, indeed. It is going to begin. The men in almost every factory and workshop in the city have

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struck work: every policeman is on duty, and the soldiers are being held in readiness. It will be a black day for Warsaw."

"There will be violence, you mean?"

"Do men get together in thousands and tens of thousands just to shake hands with one another? You are not going out?"

"Indeed I am. I have a free day—my last possibly in Warsaw—and I wish to see matters for myself. Where are the strikers in force?"

At this moment a man who was sitting near the door rose and sauntered out, followed soon afterwards by a second. I marked them well; for I guessed they might be told off to shadow me.

"They are in force everywhere," he replied. "Shall you be long away?"

"Come with me and show me things? One direction is as good as another for me."

He drew me aside and lowered his voice to a whisper: "I am supposed to be following you, you know. But if you tell me when you'll get back here, it will do." Such a clever assumption of sincerity.

"Frankly, I don't know." I did not; but not for the reason I wished him to infer. "I may soon have had enough of it." And with that I went to the door, glanced up and down the street, and then strolled off as though I had no purpose beyond the merest curiosity.

I soon perceived that I was being followed by the two men I had seen leave the hotel; and a well trained Russian sleuthhound can be very difficult

to shake off. . But I had a plan for doing this; and luck soon favoured me.

In one of the side streets off Noviswiat Street, the great business thoroughfare, a crowd of strikers stood listening to a very excited speaker. I got into the middle of them and just when he was abusing the employers and cursing the police for taking their side against the workers, I pointed out the two sleuths to the men close to me and whispered that they were police spies. The news spread like burning oil on water; and when I slipped away, the two men were the centre of a fierce, threatening mob and far too much concerned for their own safety to care what became of me.

The incident had delayed me seriously, however, and a glance at my watch showed me it was already a quarter past eleven, the hour for my appointment with Volna.

I had at least a mile to go and after a sharp walk for a couple of hundred yards, I hailed a sleigh.

Then the unexpected happened. "The Church of St. Paul as fast as you can," I called to the man as he pulled up; and I was stepping quickly into the vehicle when some one laid a hand on my shoulder.

I turned quickly; and to my infinite chagrin I found it was the agent, Burski, a little out of breath, but smiling and evidently on excellent terms with himself.

CHAPTER XXIV

BLACK MONDAY IN WARSAW

"**I** WAS almost afraid I shouldn't catch you up," said Burski.

"I thought you couldn't get away?" I growled.

"Oh, I managed it all right. I thought it would be a pity for you to miss anything I could shew you on your last day in the city; and such a day; so I hurried after you. Nearly lost you in that crowd, though. Going to the Church of St. Paul, are you? That'll make a capital starting point. Jump in."

But it was not in my programme to take him to meet Volna. "No, I think as you're with me, we shall see more if we walk," I replied, and I tossed the driver a rouble and dismissed him.

Burski laughed. "That illustrates one of my pet theories," he said; "that you English are sometimes a most changeable and impulsive people."

"I am not interested in your theories about my countrymen."

"Oh, I won't force them on you. I hate a man who is always cramming his views down your throat. He's a bore—the poorest sort of creature in the world. Which way shall we walk?"

"All ways are the same to me."

"Let us stroll on then. It will take us to the Church of St. Paul."

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I was so angry, so perplexed how to shake him off, and at the same time so anxious to get to Volna that I would not trust myself to speak. Every minute of delay increased the risk that she might tire of waiting—or jump to the conclusion that I could not keep the appointment—and go back to the house where I knew Bremenhof's men might already be waiting for her.

Burski acted as though he saw nothing of my uneasiness. He chatted away quite unconcernedly, calling my attention now to a church and again to some public building; and accepting my monosyllabic surly replies with unruffled complacency.

Once chance offered of getting away. A great crowd of strikers came marching past, filling the roadway, and as the accompanying mob of stragglers surged on to the footpath, I was about to plunge into the midst of their ranks when he slipped his arm into mine and drew me back into a doorway.

"For Heaven's sake be careful," he cried. "The scum of the city is there, and your very life might be in danger."

It appeared as though he might well be right; but I could have cursed him for his forethought all the same.

The strikers themselves looked formidable enough. There were several hundred of them, stern-faced men all; resolute, silent, determined, dogged, as though moved by a common deep-set purpose, they

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maintained a rough order of march, leaders at the head and on the flank of each band.

The mob hanging on their skirts were of a very different class, however; ill-clad, dirty, unkempt tatter-de-malions, the dregs of the alleys and by-ways of the city, ripe for any mischief or devilment. Evil men and worse women, they shuffled and scrambled and hustled along, with occasional cheers for the strikers, hoarse cries and oaths to one another, and execrations for the government: a trowsled, disorderly rabble, unquestionably dangerous, and high-charged with thoughts and hopes of violence. It would not be their fault if the day ended without open resistance, looting and bloodshed.

For many minutes precious to me they filled the streets and made progress impossible; and before they had passed, a clock near by struck twelve.

An hour past the time at which I was to have met Volna. She would surely have given me up and in all probability had already gone back to the house to which in my fatuous confidence in my own cleverness I had been reckless enough to send Bremenhof.

"Where have the strikers come from?" I asked Burski, as a sudden thought chilled me.

"From where we are going, the Square in front of the Church of St. Paul. They have an ugly look and we shall have Petersburg over again, if they don't shake themselves free from the rabble. And it may be even worse here, for the Fraternity have brought in arms and are prepared to resist. There will be fighting before night."

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"Spoken very much like a police agent that," I exclaimed.

He shrugged his shoulders. "One gets the habit, I suppose. I was a police agent long before I joined the Fraternity; and one judges of things from that standpoint at times. See, they have swept the Square clear," he added, as we reached the Church.

"And at this point we'll part company, please."

He assumed great surprise. "Part company? Why we have seen scarcely anything yet."

"I mean what I say."

He paused and then his manner changed. "I am really sorry for this, Mr. Anstruther."

"Sorry for what?"

"Of course, I have seen that I was not wanted, but the fact is I myself am being watched. I am compelled to keep with you for an hour or so."

"You suggested just now that you came because I had asked you," I rapped back.

"Well, you did ask me, didn't you? And you put it so naturally that I really thought you were in earnest."

"I wasn't. I don't wish to be seen by our friends to-day in the company of so well known a police agent as yourself."

"Let us see then how we can manage it? The simplest way will be for me to drop behind. The friends won't know we are together, and my superiors will see I am obeying orders."

"But I don't wish to be shadowed either."

He spread out his hands with an air of bewilder-

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ment. "For the sake of the Fraternity I must not lose my position in the Police. You see that?"

"I see one thing which is enough for me. I am not going to be shadowed. You may as well understand that."

"But we are not going to quarrel, surely."

"If necessary we are."

He sighed as though I were most unreasonable. "It has always been one of my pet theories——"

"Hang your theories. Are you going to persist in following me?"

"No, I am not."

"Then go your way and leave me to go mine."

"Yes, I will do that."

But he kept at my side. "Then go back."

"Very well. I am sorry I have annoyed you."

"I shan't be annoyed if you leave me now."

"I am glad to hear that."

"But you are still coming on."

"I am thinking."

The Square was nearly deserted and I looked everywhere for Volna. The clock chimed the quarter past the hour. She was not there.

I pulled up. "I have had enough of this. What are you going to do?"

"I have a suggestion. Let us go to Colonel Bremenhof and tell him. He is close here."

"Where?"

"The Place of St. John, No. 17."

I turned on him so angrily in my surprise that he drew back a pace and his right hand went to his

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pocket, where I guessed he had a revolver. But he forced a look of indifference, and keeping his eyes on mine jerked his head in the direction.

"It is only a short distance across the Square there."

It was now quite clear my scheme had gone wrong. Either Volna had been prevented from coming to meet me; or, having come had been scared away by the mob, or had given me up. If she had returned home, she was already in Bremenhof's power; and the sooner I knew of it the better. On the other hand, if she was not there, and he or his men were, I could confront him with the proof of his double dealing.

"I don't see why we shouldn't adopt the suggestion," I said, indifferently. "If Colonel Bremenhof has ordered me to be shadowed, I may as well know why. We'll go there."

"This way then," he replied, adding after a pause, "I trust you won't misunderstand my position, Mr. Anstruther."

"Why are you so anxious about it?"

"You have been so badly treated by the Department, for one thing; and of course, as a fellow member of the Fraternity, I am bound to help you all I can. But you don't seem to trust me."

"How did you know Colonel Bremenhof was at this address, the Place of St. John?"

"He sent me word this morning." He told the lie very plausibly and without the slightest hesitation.

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"You know his affairs pretty closely—what do you suppose he is doing there?"

"I should know well enough but, you see, I haven't been either at headquarters or at his house since last night, when I left to see you at the *Hotel Vladimir*."

"I should find it easier to believe you if I had not myself sent the address to him this morning at a time which made it impossible for him to have communicated it to you."

"He has a hundred secret sources of information. He must have known this long before."

"Why?"

He spread out his hand. "How otherwise could he have sent it to me?"

"If he did send it," I retorted drily.

He stopped abruptly as though an idea had just occurred to him. "Wait. Wait. How did you send it to him?"

"By my servant, Felsen."

"Then that is it," he cried. "I suspected that fellow. It was he who told me the address, declaring the chief had sent the message by him. He is a traitor, that servant of yours. The scoundrel." He was quite hot in his indignation.

"But you said he was suspect," I reminded him.

"I wished to warn you. I told you he talked. I wish I had spoken more plainly. But you are so quick, I thought you would understand."

"I am beginning to now," I replied, as we hurried on.

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As we reached the Place of St. John the noise of a great tumult reached us from the direction in which we had seen the strikers marching; the subdued roar of thousands of hoarse voices, followed first by some desultory shots and then by the rattle of musketry firing.

The people about us paused, and then began to run in the direction of the sound.

"It has begun," said Burski. "The troops are stationed by the Government Buildings and the strikers have come in conflict with them."

It was to the accompaniment of this ominous music of revolt that we approached the house. A small force of police were gathered before it, and I scanned the windows eagerly for some sign of Volna's presence. I saw nothing.

There was a short delay before we were admitted. Burski drew aside two of the men and during the short discussion, curious looks were cast at me. In the end way was made for us and we were allowed to pass.

The moment we were inside Burski said: "We must wait here;" and another man who was in the passage placed himself by my side.

It looked very, very much as though I had walked into a trap and was once more under arrest.

I glanced at Burski. "What does this mean?"

For answer he shrugged his shoulders and threw up his hands as though he was as perplexed as I. "Simply the orders, that's all."

CHAPTER XXV

NO. 17, THE PLACE OF ST. JOHN

WE stood silent for perhaps a minute and I strained my ears for the sound of voices in the rooms near. Not so much as a whisper was to be heard.

Presently the stairs creaked above, and I saw a woman, tear-stained and troubled-looking, peering cautiously down at us.

"What are you doing there? Come down," said Burski, quickly.

I guessed that she was Volna's old nurse, and that she had been listening above stairs. She came down, her eyes full of alarm.

"In which room are they?" I asked, sharply.

"The back——" she began, pointing to a door, when Burski stopped her.

"Silence," he interposed.

But I had the information I needed and sprang past him and ran up the stairs. "You must not go up, Mr. Anstruther," he cried.

"Why not? I am no prisoner," I answered; and before he could prevent me, I had reached the door and entered the room, Burski at my heels, to find Volna in a condition of mingled defiance and distress, and Bremenhof pacing the floor angrily.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried.

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"That is exactly what I have come to see," said I. Volna got up. "Is it true, Mr. Anstruther, that you sent this address to Colonel Bremenhof?"

"Should this man remain to hear what has to be said?" I asked Bremenhof, pointing to Burski.

He found the question an awkward one. Unwilling to let Burski overhear the conversation and yet equally unwilling to remain without some protection, he was at a loss what to do.

"Take the key of the door with you, Burski, and remain within call," he said, after a pause.

I waited until we three were alone and then answered Volna's question. "It is possible that Colonel Bremenhof obtained the address through me. How *did* you get it, sir?"

But Volna did not wait for him to answer. "He has told me more than once that in consideration of his allowing you to leave the country, you betrayed my address to him."

I turned to Bremenhof. "Do you repeat that now in my presence?"

"You have no right to come blustering here," he said.

"Do you repeat that story of my treachery now in my presence? Come. Dare you?"

"Don't think to intimidate me."

"I thought you would not dare. Now, will you tell Miss Drakona what really passed last night; or shall I?"

"These matters cannot be gone into now. You must both come to the Department and the whole

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thing shall be——" I put my back against the door and he took alarm instantly. He broke off and said quickly: "My men are here."

"You will not call them yet, Colonel Bremen-hof," I said very deliberately.

"Do you presume to threaten me?"

"This is a personal matter between Miss Drakona, yourself and me. You have slandered me to her, and your official position cannot and shall not—understand, shall not—prevent your giving an explanation."

"I'll soon see about that."

"Don't call your men. I warn you;" and I put my hand to my pocket as though I had a weapon concealed. I had none; but he was not a difficult person to bluff; and my look was steady enough to frighten him.

"Mr. Anstruther!" exclaimed Volna, in alarm.

"This matter must be set straight, Miss Drakona." My tone was as firm to her as it had been to him; and this served to complete his discomfiture.

"Now, Colonel Bremen-hof, I am waiting."

He sat down and was as troubled and fidgetty as a schoolboy waiting for a birching. His eyes were everywhere in the room, his lips moved nervously, and his fingers played with his beard. But he said nothing.

"I will help you to start. You gave me your word last night that Madame Drakona should be released to-day; that you would place the evidence against her in my hands at your house to-night; and

that all charges against this lady should be withdrawn. Is that true?"

"Yes; that is what I have explained," he muttered.

"The express object, as I told you plainly, was that Miss Drakona should be a perfectly free agent to marry my friend Count Ladislas Tuleski or not as she chose."

"I have said that too, in effect."

"In effect!" cried Volna contemptuously.

"The one condition you imposed was that I should leave the country, and to that I agreed."

"That is only your way of putting it," he said, beginning to gather courage as the minutes passed.

"I wrote as much to you this morning, Miss Drakona, and gave the letter to my servant, Felsen, to bring to you. Have you received it?"

"Colonel Bremenhof has given it to me, Mr. Anstruther."

"Turned letter carrier, eh?" said I, drily.

"The explanation of my possession of it is perfectly simple. Your servant was arrested by one of my men this morning; and when he was searched, the letter was found upon him. I deemed it best to bring it here myself."

"And to add that I betrayed the address to you?"

"Your man told me that you had instructed him to bring it to me. Of course, he may have lied. But how was I to know that?"

His air of blameless innocence, as palpably false

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as his explanation, was laughable; but it was my cue at the moment to accept both.

"There is only one thing that really matters," I declared. "Are you prepared to keep your word to release Madame Drakona, to give up the evidence against her, and to certify officially that there is no charge against Miss Drakona here?"

His start of anger and the vicious look he shot at me showed that he appreciated the tight corner in which this put him. He was hesitating how to answer, when unfortunately Volna's indignation would not be restrained.

"If you are satisfied with the explanation, Mr. Anstruther, I am not. Colonel Bremenhof's charge against you was of deliberate, not involuntary betrayal. That it was part of your pledge to him."

I raised my hand in protest; but it was too late. He saw his chance and took it at once cunningly. He rose and said: "If I am already judged, nothing more can be done here. Burski!" he called in a loud ringing voice.

I stepped from the door and Burski and the second man entered.

"You called, Colonel?"

"We are going to the offices of the Department. Let the Englishman be searched. He has a weapon."

Burski drew his revolver and turned to me.

"No, you are mistaken. I know what you thought. See!" and I turned my pocket inside out.

"I don't resist."

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Resistance being useless, it was just as well to make a virtue of offering none.

"You threatened me," said Bremenhof.

"Is that the charge against me?"

"The charge will be explained in proper time," he snapped.

"And I will see that the explanation is proper, too."

"Silence!" he cried. Now that his men were present, his natural instincts as an official bully reasserted themselves.

It was an ugly development of the situation; and my chagrin was the more bitter because only my own blind self-confidence had brought it about.

Volna blamed herself, however, setting it all down to her last angry interposition. "I am so sorry," she said to me. "This is my fault."

"Not a bit of it. He meant to do it in any case. You only made it a little easier for him to show his hand. The real blame is mine, as I will explain to you."

"The explanation will have to wait," sneered Bremenhof. "You have many other things to explain first. See that a carriage is brought, Burski, for Miss Drakona to go with me. You will take the Englishman. Take him away now."

Volna gave a cry of distress, and was coming toward me when Bremenhof pushed between us.

"You must not speak to the prisoner," he said, bluntly.

"Come, Mr. Anstruther," said Burski.

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"You need have no fear on my account, Miss Drakona," I assured her, as I went out with Burski.

"What is the reason for this?" he asked, as we stood a moment on the landing, after he had sent his companion for the carriage.

"It means that for the moment you have outplayed me—for the moment, that's all."

"Can I help you?"

I looked at him steadily. "Yes, by dropping your pretence."

"You wrong me, friend. I can still help you to escape. I can get you out of the city, if you will."

"Colonel Bremenhof's orders, eh? No, thank you; not again. I am just as anxious to be a prisoner now as he is to get me out of the city."

"He means mischief for you. I told you last night."

"You told me many lies last night and acted others. And I have had quite enough of them and of you. Now, go ahead and do as he told you."

He shrugged his shoulders. "If you get to Headquarters it will be too late," he said.

At that moment his comrade came running up. "If the prisoners are to be taken, Burski, you'd better come. There's a crowd of the strikers close by."

Burski looked at me sharply.

I smiled. "May be a bit awkward for you, eh?"

We went down to the front door.

"Is the carriage there yet?" asked Burski.

"Just driven up," was the reply.

The clamour of a crowd outside reached our ears. I put out my hand to open the door and Burski stopped me. He was looking very anxious. "Call the chief," he said hurriedly.

The man sprang up the stairs.

Burski and I were left alone.

The clamour outside increased and some one knocked at the door.

"Why don't you open the door? If you are in earnest about helping me to escape, let me call in the crowd."

Instead of replying he drew his revolver.

The knock was repeated, and a voice called: "Burski, Stragoff, either of you. Quick, man, quick, if you're coming."

The noise of the crowd was growing every moment, and my guard's perplexity grew with it.

The door of the room above us was opened, and Bremenhof called, "Burski, Burski. Are you there?"

Attracted by the call his eyes left me a moment. The next I had his revolver hand in mine, and, having the advantage of the surprise, wrenched it away from him.

He called out, and Bremenhof and the second man came running down.

The noise without shewed that the crowd were close to the house. I threw the door wide open.

Two men were on the doorstep and fell back at the sight of the weapon in my hand.

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The crowd were close at hand, streaming past the corner of the Place of St. John.

I fired two shots in the air. At the sound the crowd turned and faced towards me.

"The police are here. Rescue! Rescue!" I shouted with all the strength of my lungs.

A loud roar of angry shouts answered me, and a number of the men breaking from the crowd came pouring toward the house.

The police agents outside darted away like hares.

At the same instant Burski and the others seized me; and after a short, fierce struggle I was dragged back inside and the door was slammed just as the first comers from the mob reached the house.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TABLES TURNED

THE tables were turned now, and as the mob howled and clamoured and hammered at the door, a braver man than Bremenhof might well have lost his nerve.

He was pale, and trembled, partly with anger, but more with terror, as he stared at me in doubt what I would do next.

The chances of the struggle had left me nearest the door; and as I had retained possession of Burski's revolver, I had command of the situation.

"You won't let them in," he said, as the hammering at the door increased in violence, and the crowd yelled for it to be opened. "They'll tear us to pieces if you do. For God's sake."

"You are willing to keep your word now, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes, in everything. Everything," he replied eagerly.

Then Burski, who was as cool and collected as his chief was agitated, made a move the purpose of which I was to see later. He whispered to his companions, and Bremenhof hurried back up the staircase and the other man ran away to the back of the house.

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"Now, Mr. Anstruther, we must face this out together. What are you going to do?"

Those outside were battering at the door with a violence that threatened to break it down every moment. A heavy stone was hurled through the small glass light above it, and a loud cheer greeted the smash.

I turned and threw the door open and then his object was made plain.

As I opened it, he sent up a great shout.

"Help! help!" he called, in ringing stentorian tones. "Thank God you have come, friends. The rest of the cursed police have bolted, but I've kept this one from escaping. My fellow prisoners are upstairs."

It was a clever ruse; and in an instant a dozen hands shot out eagerly to grab me. I sprang back and Burski tried to block my retreat; but I thrust him away and reached the stairs.

"Stop. This is a trick," I shouted. "That is the police agent. I am an Englishman. It was I who fired the shots just now and called for help."

A babel of oaths and confused cries greeted this; and the men in front halted a moment in hesitation.

Burski saw the hesitation. "He lies, like the police dog he is, to save his skin," he called. "Look at the weapon in his hand. Some of you will know the police pattern."

A yell of execration followed this cunning stroke, as the crowd threatened me.

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"I took it from him," I said; but I was not believed and a rush was made at me again.

To stop this I backed up the narrow stairway and levelled the weapon at them. Those in front flinched and hung back at the sight of it.

"Do you want any further proof," cried Burski. "Is there any leader of the Fraternity here? I can soon convince him." His cool audacity was wonderful.

A cry was raised from someone; and a pause followed while a new comer elbowed his way to Burski. A shout greeted his coming, and all eyes were upon the two as they interchanged a few words in low tones. What passed I do not know, probably some secret sign was given; and it sufficed.

"This man is one of us," was the verdict; and at the decision a deafening yell of rage and curses broke out as the mob turned to me again.

"Police spy. Liar. Dog. Down with him!"

"Hear me," I shouted; but my voice was drowned in the curses of the mob.

Another rush was made at me, to be stopped again by the levelled revolver.

Then the new comer held up his hand.

"If you are a friend give up your weapon."

"Clear the house of all except yourself and one or two more and I will. I can convince you."

"Do you want to walk into a police trap, friend?" asked Burski, with a sneer. He had the crowd with him now and they echoed the sneer with a laugh.

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But the leader was a persistent fellow in his way. "How many are in the house?" he asked Burski.

The latter shrugged his shoulders. "There were plenty just now; enough to treat me pretty roughly; and I'm no bantling."

"There are no police in the house except that man and one other. He knows that," I declared.

The leader turned to the crowd and tried to reason with them; but it was useless. Not a man would leave the house. Some began to murmur and growl at him for his interference; and the yells and cries against me redoubled in violence.

Then for a while things went all wrong with me. One of the fellows in the hallway picked up a mat and with a raucous laugh and an oath flung it at me. It hit me full in the face; and a burst of laughter and wild cheering hailed the shot.

Before I knew anything more, another man rushed up the stairs and caught me by the legs. Down I went backwards, my weapon flew out of my hand, and in an instant I was hauled down the stairs, feet first into the seething mass of infuriated men; grabbed here, thrust there, beaten, kicked and hustled all ways at once, to the accompaniment of such screeching, oathing and yelling as I hope I may never hear again, at least under similar conditions.

Matters would have been much worse with me, indeed, but for one stroke of luck. One of the crowd, a grimy, vile-smelling creature, in his eagerness to get a kick at my head fell asprawl over me as I lay against the wall; I grabbed him tight and

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hung on to him, using his fat carcass as a shield until his piercing screams for help let his friends see what was happening.

The attack ceased while they dragged him free. I managed to scramble to my feet at the same time, and with my back to the wall I used my fists right and left upon the front rank of hot, straining, sweating, staring faces in a desperate effort to win a way back to the stairs.

Against such numbers I could gain no more than a moment's respite, however. But it proved enough.

A revolver shot rang out from the stairway and drew all eyes that way.

It was Volna.

Running from the room above she had seen my pistol on the stairs and her quick wits had suggested to her the means of stopping the tumult. She had discharged it over the heads of the crowd and had thus gained a hearing.

Her lovely face flushed and her eyes alight with indignation, she used the moment of astonishment to dash right into the midst of the crowd and reach my side.

"Shame, men, shame," she cried. "Would you tear your friends to pieces? I am one of the prisoners and this is the other."

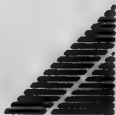
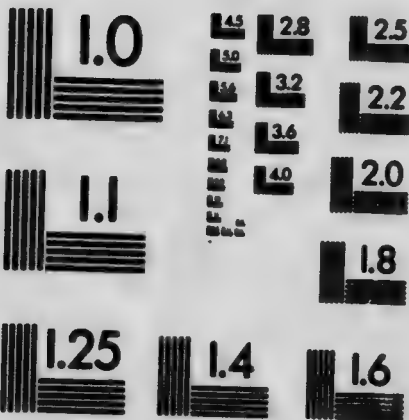
The fickleness of a mob is a proverb. Her plucky act succeeded where all arguments and inducements would have failed. The crowd swung over to her side and cheered her lustily.

Burski was quick to appreciate the probable re-



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sults to him; and I saw him begin to edge his way to the door to escape.

"Stop that man," I called, pointing to him.

In an instant his path was blocked; and I hoped that he was going to have a taste of the treatment of which he had secured such a full meal for me.

He would have had it surely enough but for an interruption from outside.

The luck had turned right in our favour. Three or four men shouldered their way into the house and in their midst I saw my friend Ladislás. He was known to many of the crowd, who made way for him with a loud cheer.

In a few words I made the situation clear to him, and added that Bremenhof was in the room above, and that if the crowd got wind of it in their present temper, they would tear him to pieces.

He succeeded ultimately in inducing the people to leave the house; and putting Burski in charge of three men, Ladislás, Volna and I went up to Bremenhof.

He was in a condition of desperate terror and, as we entered, started up and stared at us wide-eyed, trembling and abject.

"You are in no danger, Colonel Bremenhof," said Ladislás. "They shall take my life before I will see you harmed."

"Not quite so fast as that, Ladislás," I declared. "Colonel Bremenhof knew what his man, Burski, intended in setting the crowd on me, and I have a reckoning to settle."

The hunted expression in his eyes which had been calmed somewhat by my friend's words, returned as he asked: "What do you mean?"

"You shall know that in a moment. First understand that the mob are still outside—their blood is up. They have just been cheated of one victim, myself, handed over to them in your stead by the cunning of your man and with your connivance. I have but to open the door and speak your name to them: and what they did to me will be a trifle to what they'll do to you."

"Anstruther!" protested Ladislas.

"This is my matter, man. Leave it to me, please. If you'd been down under that mob's feet, you'd feel as I do. Now you," and Bremenhof cowered again as I turned to him. "Listen to me. Even when I was in danger of my life, I kept secret the fact that you were here in the house; and saved your life. Out of no regard for you, believe me; for I swear that if you refuse to do exactly what I tell you now, I will drag you down with my own hands and pitch you into the midst of the rabble."

"What do you want?"

"But little more than you promised me last night. Madame Drakona's release at once, and the delivery of the evidence you hold against her, an official statement that there is no charge of any kind against her daughter here; and a definite written admission of the part you have taken throughout this. You'll play no more tricks on me."

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"Yes, I agree. I'll do it the instant I get to the Department."

"Thank you. I know how you keep such pledges. You will write the order for Madame Drakona's release here at once and will send it by Burski, your trusted servant, with orders to conduct her to a place we'll settle."

"But at such a time difficulties may be raised and——"

"Yes or no, quick. As for the difficulties, you'll remain in our hands until you have found how to get over them. Burski was clever enough to get me into a mess a few minutes since. Now you can use his cleverness to get you out of one."

"Yes. Let me see him."

"One word. You are earning your life; understand that. Attempt any treachery and——" I left the sentence unfinished.

"I'll do it," he agreed. "Anything. Anything."

Volna fetched some writing materials and while Bremenhof wrote the order, I conferred with Ladislav and settled the details of the plan.

We dared not stay longer in that house because the police would soon be back in great force to Bremenhof's rescue; and Ladislav named a place to which we could take him. But we could not have Madame Drakona brought to the same place, because Burski would in that event take the police with her. We arranged, therefore, that Madame Drakona should be taken to her own house.

Moreover, as the kernel of everything was to

prevent Volna's arrest, she could not go home to receive her mother; but that difficulty the telephone solved for us. We settled to wait at the place to which Ladislav would take us until a telephone message from the Drakonas' house assured us that Madame Drakona was there and alone.

When the order was ready I fetched Burski. Bremenhof gave him his instructions, and I said enough to convince them both that Bremenhof's safety depended entirely upon their keeping faith with us.

Ladislav then explained matters to the leaders of the mob. The crowd had meanwhile decreased in numbers, and those who remained were induced to disperse.

A carriage was fetched and we four started, leaving Burski in charge of a couple of the men who had come with Ladislav, to be dispatched on his errand as soon as our carriage was out of sight.

We had done well so far; but there was still much to do. A slight check to the plans at any moment might mean the ruin of everything. If the luck lasted, we should win, and only complete success could justify the desperate move I had taken.

Would the luck last?

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PLAN PROSPERS

IF Bremenhof had been less of a coward such a plan as ours would have been absolutely impossible. But the sight of the mob's fury had so saturated him with fear that it bereft him of the power to make even a show at resistance.

I did my utmost to play on that terror. During the short ride, I sat opposite to him, holding in full sight the revolver which had already done us such conspicuous service; and when we reached our destination I linked my left arm in his as I walked him into the house, taking care that he should see I still held the weapon ready for use.

What I should really have done had he made an effort to escape I don't know; but I am sure I had convinced him that I should shoot. That fear of me made him my slave. He watched my every gesture, started nervously when I looked at him, and flinched whenever I spoke.

As soon as we were in the house I set him to work to write the official declaration that he had investigated the charges against Volna, and had found them unfounded; and then the full statement of the part he had played throughout.

Volna meanwhile called up the servant at their house, and having ascertained that no police were

in possession there, told the girl how to call us up the instant that Madame Drakona should reach home.

There was nothing more to be done but to wait for that message. I left Volna and Ladislav together and remained with Bremenhof.

The extent to which he was subject to my influence during the hours in that house was remarkable. To me quite unaccountable indeed. He was as docile as though I had possessed hypnotic power and had used it to subdue him.

With the revolver always carefully in hand I sat and stared at him steadily, sternly, continuously in one long, tense, dead silence. I concentrated all my thoughts upon the one essential object, to force the conviction upon him that death would be the instant penalty of resistance to my will.

Twice only was the silence broken. Once when he showed me what he had written and I ordered an alteration; and once at the close when I asked him how he was going to get for me the evidence against Madame Drakona.

This was the one thing in which I could not see the way. I must have it before the spell of fear I had cast upon him was broken; and yet I knew, from what Burski had told me on the previous night, the difficulties which were in the way. What Bremenhof said now confirmed this, and he was so panic-saturated that I believed he was past lying. He professed himself as anxious as I was to solve the difficulty.

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The problem was this. The papers were in the safe in his library, and there was a man on guard over it; Bremenhof had the key with him; and he had given the most absolute order that no one should even enter the room in his absence.

If I went to the house myself with the key and a written authority from him, it was in the highest degree unlikely, that, being unknown, I should be allowed to get to the safe. It was very likely indeed, that, on such a day of tumult, I should fall under suspicion, and be promptly placed under arrest.

Volna was known to the servants and was thus less likely to fail; but I was loath for her to run the risk. Burski might be back at the house, and he knew enough of the matter now to understand that her arrest would checkmate our whole scheme.

Bremenhof protested that if I would let him go, he would give up the papers. "I pledge you my solemn word of honour. I'll take any oath you please, do anything you ask."

"To whom can you give them?"

"Come with me, and I will give them to you."

"Thank you. I know how you keep faith. I won't walk open-eyed in another of your traps."

"I'll send them to you, then."

"Yes; by a strong body of police with orders to take me back with them. I know the risk I've run now in bringing you here, and have no fancy for a march across the plains. You must find some other means. Otherwise I shall hand you over to the

strikers to be held until we are out of this cursed country.

"For God's sake," he cried, nerve-racked and abject at the thought; and after that I resumed the silent watch which he found so trying an ordeal.

After a time Volna came in.

"My mother is free, Mr. Anstruther. She is at home; the agent, Burski, took her there and no police are left in the house."

"You see, I have kept faith," said Bremenhof eagerly.

"I see that you couldn't help it, that's all."

"On my honour I will do all I have promised."

"When the devil's sick he makes an earnest penitent."

"I renounce all claim to this lady's hand."

"What the wolf said when he was in the trap."

"My God, what do you mean to do then?" he cried, tossing up his hands.

"I mean to have that evidence. I will adopt your own suggestion and go to your house with you."

"Mr. Anstruther!" protested Volna.

"Leave this to me, please," I said.

"I pledge my honour you will run no risk," declared Bremenhof.

Volna's lip curled at this mention of his honour.

"You will not trust him? You cannot. You must not."

"Let me speak to you," I said. We went outside leaving the door ajar that I could watch Bremenhof.

"I can trust myself in this if not him. Let your

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mother leave the house for some place where she will be safe until you can join her. You must both remain in hiding, prepared to leave the city the instant we can get you away."

"But you——" she interposed.

"Please. I shall come to no great harm. We have taken a risk with Bremenhof to-day; but with the proofs against your mother in our hands and with the papers he has signed here to-day, my friends can put up a fight on my account which, even if he dares to face it, will get me out without much trouble."

"You must not run this risk," she protested.

"I have put the worst that can happen even if he breaks faith and arrests me; but I have him so frightened, I don't believe he will dare to attempt any tricks. I have a way to keep him scared, too. Where is Ladislav? I want him to get a sleigh with a driver who can be relied on in an emergency."

"I don't like it. We have no right to ask anything of this kind of you."

"You must do what I ask, please."

"No, no. I would rather run the risk of arrest myself."

"That would do no good now. He has all this against me just the same."

"You can leave the city. Besides, if I agree to do what he——"

"We shall quarrel if you say that again. And I hope we are too good friends for that."

She placed her hand on my arm and looked

earnestly in my eyes. "You don't know how this tries me."

"It is for Ladislav's sake," I said steadily.

She bit her lip and dropped her eyes. "I would rather anything than this," she murmured hesitatingly. There was a pause full of embarrassment to me; then, rather to my surprise, she looked up with a smile: "I had forgotten. I agree," she said.

Her sudden change of manner puzzled me.

She saw my surprise. "You have convinced me, that is all. I had forgotten."

"Forgotten what?"

"It is never too late to——" She paused.

"To what?"

"To remember what I can still do," she replied cryptically. "I will tell Ladislav about the sleigh." And without more she smiled again and left me.

I returned to Bremenhof.

"I have sent for a sleigh to take us to your house. You have given me your word that I shall be safe——"

"I swear it," he cried eagerly.

"I am going to trust to it, but not without taking a precaution on my own account. My liberty will be in your hands while I am in your house; and you had better know that I would rather lose my life than be sent to your cursed mines in Siberia. Get that clearly into your mind."

"I swear to you——"

"Never mind about any more swearing. You know by this time that I mean what I say. And I

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mean this. I know the risk I have run to-day, and rather than let your men make me a prisoner I will blow my brains out. Unlike you, I am not afraid of death. Mark this well, then. I shall not die alone." I paused, and added with all the tense fierceness I could put into my tone and manner. "If you give me the slightest cause to suspect treachery, even to suspect it, mark you, that instant will be your last in life. From the moment we leave this house together to that when I leave yours with the papers in my possession, I shall be at your side, this barrel against your ribs, and my finger on the trigger. Try to trick me, and by the God that made us both, I swear I'll shoot you like a dog."

He gave a deep sigh, the sweat of fear clustered thick on his grey-white forehead, and he sank back in his chair.

He was so drunk with fear that he was past speech. He looked up once or twice as if to speak, and his blanched lips moved; but the moment his eyes met mine he faltered and trembled and looked down, his tongue refusing to frame the words.

Presently Ladislav came in.

"I wish to speak to Colonel Bremenhof," he said.

"Not now, Ladislav," I said. I would not have the effect of my threat lessened by any distracting thoughts.

"I wish to make him understand we have done all we can to prevent violence in the city."

"Go away, please. I have given him all I want

him to understand for the present. Let me know when we are to start."

Greatly wondering, my friend yielded and left us alone again.

With intentional ostentation I looked to the loading of my revolver. Bremenhof watched me furtively; and each time I looked up from the task, he shrank and drooped his head.

At last Ladislav called that the sleigh was waiting. "The driver has his orders," he whispered. "and will bring you to us afterwards."

"Come," I said to Bremenhof, as I rose.

"You are wronging me, Mr. Anstruther," he stammered, as he got up unsteadily.

"I can apologize afterwards," said I drily.

As we were leaving the house Volna stood waiting for us, and would have spoken to me; but I would not leave Bremenhof's side.

I was wearing a long cloak, and as Bremenhof and I crossed the pavement to the sleigh, I pressed close to him and let him feel my weapon against his body.

He started and caught his breath in fear. The strain had told on him. He staggered in his walk, and his face wore the grey look of one on the verge of death.

So long as I could keep him in that mood I was safe enough.

We got into the sleigh in silence, and had barely turned out of the street when a body of troops came in sight riding in our direction.

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"This will test your sincerity," I said. "As well now as later. Remember my oath."

At a sign from the leader our driver drew to one side and pulled up.

I thrust the barrel of the pistol hard against Bremenhof's side. The officer recognized him, and with a salute halted his men.

"We are in a hurry and cannot delay," I whispered.

Bremenhof returned the salute and waved his hand for the troops to pass.

The officer ordered his men to make room for the sleigh and we dashed on at a high speed.

"Good," I said, suppressing a sigh of relief.

"You have learnt your lesson, I see."

CHAPTER XXVIII

FLIGHT

THE meeting with the troops proved to be an invaluable incident.

There had been a tense moment when the question whether Bremenhof would attempt treachery still hung in the balance. A moment more thrilling than any I had ever known in my life.

With his lame and craven submission, however, a change seemed to come in everything. That I could compel him to cross the city in broad daylight when hundreds of his police and soldiers were swarming everywhere, and so frighten him as to prevent him raising an alarm, had seemed in anticipation little more than the merest forlorn hope.

But when at the first test he had yielded abjectly, my confidence was so strengthened and my domination over him so confirmed, that the thing became almost simple and commonplace.

We met other bodies of police and military as we dashed over the snow to the merry peal of our sleigh bells, but not once was there even the threat of trouble.

It was rather as though we were making a tour of inspection together, jointly interested in the police and military preparations for coping with the excited populace.

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We passed many evidences of the popular unrest. But Ladislas had apparently given the driver very shrewd instructions as to his route, for not once did we drive through a street where any actual disturbance was in progress.

More than once we saw conflicts going on between the troops or police and the mob. But always from a safe distance. More than once, too, we passed where trouble had broken out. Wrecked houses and workshops told of the anger of the people, and grim patches of bloodstained snow testified that the troops were not in the city for nothing.

Here and there we passed strikers whose limping walk, bandaged limbs, or bleeding faces bore evidence of recent fighting; and we drove rapidly past more than one small group gathered pale-faced and sorrowful about a figure stretched at length on the snow. These things told their own tale.

Twice Brehmenhof was recognized, and howls and shouts and bitter curses were hurled at us. Once we were followed, stones were thrown, and even a couple of shots fired after us; but the swiftness of our horses quickly carried us out of danger.

I could not help speculating what the crowd would have said and done had they known the mission on which we were bent, and the grim cause which had brought us two together upon that strange ride.

We reached his house in safety, and as the driver reined up his panting horses I braced myself for the final trial of nerves.

"Remember my oath," I whispered, as together we mounted the steps side by side. My fear was that as soon as he found himself once more in the midst of his men, his courage would return sufficiently for him to at least put up some show of fight.

Had he done so, he must have beaten me. Despite my oath and all my fiercely spoken threats, I had no intention of shooting him. It was all just bluff on my part; but I had acted well enough to prevent his having any suspicion of this. He was convinced that I was in grim, deadly earnest, and that his life hung on a thread, and he was poltroon enough to buy it at any cost.

The proceedings in the house were very brief.

He went straight to the library and sent the man on guard out of the room. He was as anxious to be relieved from the menacing barrel of my revolver as I was to get the papers and be off.

In silence he opened the safe and after a hurried search found the papers and offered them to me. They made a somewhat bulky package.

"Shew me," I said.

He opened the package and held each while I ran my eye over it; and then folded them together in the portfolio and handed it to me.

"One thing more. A written authority from you to me in open terms. Just write 'The bearer is acting by my authority,' signed and sealed officially."

Without hesitation he obeyed and wrote what I wanted.

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"You will accompany me to the sleigh," I said, as I pocketed the paper.

We left the room together arm in arm just as we had entered it, passed the men in the hall and down the steps to the sleigh.

Then I saw trouble.

Some distance up the street a patrol of mounted police was riding toward us at the walk, and in an instant I perceived the danger this spelt for me.

So did Bremenhof. The sight seemed to rouse his long dormant courage. He pushed me away from him, jumped back, and called in a loud ringing tone for help.

The police came running out from his house; the patrol pricked up their horses; and as I sprang into the sleigh, the street seemed suddenly alive with men.

My driver knew his business, however. The horses he had were spirited and full of blood, and in a moment we were rattling along at full speed, the bells ringing and jingling furiously, the driver shouting lusty warnings, and the sleigh jumping and jolting so that I had to grip tight to save myself from being thrown out.

The patrol pulled up to speak with Bremenhof, and, as we dashed round a corner, I saw him mount one of the horses and come clattering after us, leading the rest in hot pursuit.

But we had a good start by that time, and my driver, guiding his team with rare skill and judgment, made a dozen quick turns through short

streets. This prevented our pursuers from spurring their animals to the gallop, kept them in doubt as to the direction we had taken, and thus minimized their advantage of saddle over harness.

To that manoeuvre was due our success in evading immediate capture.

Doubtful of ultimate success in such a chase, however, I proposed to the driver to pull up and let me get away on foot.

"The Count is close here," he replied, to my great surprise; and after we had raced along in this fashion for some ten minutes, I saw Volna and Ladislav waiting at a corner. The driver pulled up, and they jumped in.

"Sergius was to look for us here," said Ladislav, in explanation. "What has happened?"

I told him briefly as we continued the flight.

"We shall get away," he said confidently. "Sergius knows his work. He has not his equal in Warsaw," and it looked at that moment as though his confidence was well grounded.

Volna was very calm, but the glances she kept casting behind bore witness to her anxiety.

"I hope you are right," I replied to Ladislav; "but you should not have come."

"Were we likely to desert you, Mr. Anstruther?" asked Volna.

"You could do no good, and the risk is too great."

"We had to know what happened to you. I could not rest."

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I understood then the meaning of her former words. It was never too late for her last desperate sacrifice should our plan go wrong. "The risk is too serious," I repeated.

It was churlish to reproach them for an act which sprang from a chivalrous regard for my safety; but they had made a grave mistake. They had rendered my escape much more difficult.

Had I been alone I could have left the sleigh and made off on foot. The crowd in some of the streets was thick enough for me to have lost myself among them and so to have got away unnoticed. But with three of us together the case was different. There was nothing for it but to remain in the sleigh and trust to the driver's skill to save us.

Presently the good fortune which had befriended me changed. Turning into one of the side streets we found the roadway partially blocked by some heavy drays. We had to pull up, and moments, precious to us beyond count, were lost as we waited for room to be made for us to squeeze through.

The street was a long one without a turning, and before we reached the end of it, Volna, who was looking back, gave a cry of dismay.

"They are in sight," she said; and we saw Breminhof and three or four men spurring after us at full speed.

Ladislav called to Sergius, who lashed his horses and redoubled his efforts to make up some of the time we had lost.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To Madame Drakona. Three miles out on the Smolna road."

Sergius began his tactics of sharp turns again, swinging round corner after corner at a reckless speed. But beyond proving his great skill as a daring whip, he did little good.

Bremenhof began to gain fast upon us, and at length came within pistol range.

He called to us to surrender, and when we paid no heed, his men fired at us. Volna winced and shrank at the shots; but we were not hit and held on grimly.

It could not last much longer, however; and just when things were looking bad enough from behind, a big dray heavily laden came lumbering toward us, blocking the whole street.

"We must give it up," said Ladislas.

But Sergius saw a desperate chance and took it. The heavy vehicle was making for a narrow side street. To wait until it had turned would have brought Bremenhof upon us, and the leading horses of the waggon were actually turning into the side street when Sergius, with wonderful skill, and at the risk of all our lives, swung round into the opening. Our horses and sleigh cannoned against the leaders, the sleigh gave a dangerous lurch, was thrown on to the one roller, all but toppled over, and then righted. It was touch and go; but the luck was ours, and on we went.

We even gained a little by the mishap, for our pursuers being unable to check their horses in time,

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were carried past the street opening, while the heavy dray blocked the road and delayed them.

But the advantage was too slight to hold out hope of escape.

"We must leave the sleigh and take our chance on foot," I said.

Ladislav called an order to the driver, and when we had traversed half the length of the street and Bremenhof and his men had just passed the dray, Sergius pulled his animals on to their haunches at the mouth of an alley, waited while we jumped to the ground, and then dashed away again at the same reckless speed.

"We can get through here to the street of St. Gregory, and may find shelter," said Ladislav, leading the way through the alley in a last desperate dash for freedom.

Then again fortune did us an ill turn. Half way through the place Volna caught her foot and fell. She was up again in a moment, but limped badly. She had twisted her ankle in the fall.

Ladislav and I put each an arm under hers, and in this way made such haste as we could.

But the delay served to bring our pursuers close upon us; and they came running at top speed after us, making three yards to our one.

Again capture seemed inevitable. Then recalling the incident of earlier in the day at the house in the Place of St. John, I repeated it.

I fired my revolver in the air. "The police! The police!" I shouted. "A rescue! A rescue!"

It served us in good stead. The noise brought men and women rushing in alarm and curiosity from the houses on both sides of the alley, while many others ran in from the street beyond. Seeing our plight they cheered us and swarmed between Bremenhof's party and us, blocking and hampering them so that we reached the end in safety.

The outlet to the alley was a narrow archway. Room was made for us to pass, and we gained the street while our pursuers were struggling and fighting to force their way through after us.

But again the respite seemed only to mock us.

We ran out only to find ourselves on the skirts of an ugly tumult. A short distance to our left down the street of St. Gregory, a fight was in progress between a considerable body of police and a crowd of strikers, and just as we emerged from the alley the police were getting the upper hand and the strikers were beginning to waver.

Some one raised the cry that a large body of police were coming through the alley, and the crowd, afraid of being caught between two fires, gave way and came streaming toward us followed by the police.

At that juncture Bremenhof and his men succeeded in reaching the street and joined the other police in a vigorous attack upon the crowd.

The situation was again critically perilous for us.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN THE STREET OF ST. GREGORY

THE luck seemed to be dead against us. Volna could scarcely put her foot to the ground and, although she struggled gamely to continue the flight, Ladislav and I were all but carrying her.

The crowd went streaming past us as we could make only the slowest progress; and as no vehicle of any sort was in sight, capture appeared inevitable.

Volna perceived this and begged us to leave her. "It will be far better for me to be arrested alone than for all three to be taken; and you see it is hopeless now that the three can escape."

"I am not going," said Ladislav.

"Mr. Anstruther, you have the proofs that will free my mother. If you will escape and destroy them, she will be safe. Please go."

It was a shrewd plea.

I took out the papers and held them toward Ladislav. "You go. I can trust my friends to get me out of any mess."

"No; to-day's business with Bremenhof is too serious for that," he answered. "Besides, this is my affair. Go, Robert. It is sheer madness for you to remain. You can do no good."

"If my mother is safe, Mr. Anstruther, I do not

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care. For her sake as well as your own, get those papers away."

I glanced round and saw Bremenhof was fast forcing his way to us through the scattering crowd.

"We may get a sleigh or a carriage at the end of the street there," I said; and without more ado, I picked Volna up in my arms and ran up the street with her.

The crowd cheered us lustily. Someone recognized Ladislas, rallied the flying crowd and succeeded in reforming them again when we had passed.

Perceiving this, and recognizing that we might in this way escape even at the last moment, Bremenhof, hoping to awe the crowd, ordered the police to draw their revolvers. At first the people fell back, but encouraged by the cries of the man who had constituted himself the leader they formed again, and answered the order to clear the way with yells and shouts of defiance.

Losing his head Bremenhof told his men to fire. A ragged volley of pistol shots followed and two men fell wounded.

For an instant a solemn hush fell; and then rose such a wild fierce yell of rage and fury from the mob that the police drew back in suspense.

The two parties stood facing one another for a breathing space. Then some one threw a heavy stone and struck one of the police in the face. Two of his comrades near him fired in return. A volley of stones was hurled by the crowd, and a wild and

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desperate conflict was waged over the bodies of the fallen men.

People came running to the scene from all directions. Many of them were armed with clubs, hatchets, crowbars, and such weapons as could be snatched up in a hurry. Some carried revolvers; and, as we stood awhile, unable for the press of the people to get forward, a fierce hand-to-hand fight was waged. Hard blows were given on either side, shots were exchanged, and blood flowed freely, until the police were beaten back in their turn and had to fly.

The mob whooped and yelled and halloed savagely over their victory, and pressed forward hot and eager to wreak their anger upon the flying men.

The triumph was short-lived, however. Into the street from the end for which we were making swung a large force of troops to the rescue of the police.

I drew Volna back into the doorway of a house as they passed at the double; and the fight broke out again this time with the advantage all against the strikers.

Men fell fast, and the crowd scattered and made for cover in the houses on either side of the street.

Escape for us was now impossible for the time, for the fight raged close to the door of the house where we had sheltered.

In the thick of the fight at some distance from us, I could see Bremenhof. If he had been a coward while we two had been alone and he believed death

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to be close to him, he was no coward now. He was not like the same man. Passion, or the company of his men, gave him courage. He was everywhere, directing his men and exposing himself fearlessly where the fighting was hottest; and always seeking to press forward as though in pursuit of us.

Fresh tactics were next adopted by the crowd. Men who had fled from the street appeared at the open windows of the houses and fired on the police and troops from this vantage. Many shots told; and to save themselves from this form of attack, the troops began to enter the houses in their turn and search for the armed men.

And all this time the press and throng of police and strikers made escape for us impossible.

After a time the training of the troops and police told; the crowds in the streets lessened; many prisoners were taken, most of them bloodstained with marks of the conflict; and the noise of the conflict began to die down. But not for long.

The news that fighting was in progress had spread far and wide, and a body of strikers who had been parading the main street near were attracted to the scene.

The police in their turn found themselves caught between two hostile mobs; and the flame of fight which had almost flickered down flared up again more luridly and vigorously than ever.

The prisoners were torn from the grasp of their captors in the moment of surprise, and hurried past us to the rear of the fighters.

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The troops were still strong enough, however, to make the fight even; and after the first moment of surprise, their discipline told. They formed in lines facing up and down the street, and settled down with grim resolve for the deadly work before them.

Then came a loud cry of "A barricade! A barricade!"

In little more than a minute a couple of heavy waggons were trundled out from a side street, and turned over close to where we three were waiting. Out from the houses were fetched a heterogeneous collection of furniture—bedsteads, mattresses, couches, chests of drawers, shop counters, chairs, tables, anything and everything that lay to hand was seized and brought out. Some were even hurled from windows above. And behind the impromptu rampart armed men crouched mad with long pent passion, and eager to wreak vengeance upon their enemies.

Meanwhile Ladislav had viewed the scene with fast mounting distress and agitation. The deliberateness of these last preparations for the fight seemed to appal him. The sight of this harvest of violence sprung from the seeds of his own revolutionary theorizing wrung his heart. Dreaming of victory by peaceful means, the horror of this bloodshed and carnage goaded him to despair. His suffering was acute.

Heedless of his own safety he rushed hither and thither among those who were leading the mob, dis-

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suading them from violence and urging them to abandon their resistance.

Half a dozen times when he had dashed out to press his plea of non-resistance, I had had almost to drag him back into safety.

The lull that came when the barricade was forming gave him a fresh opportunity. In vain I told him that nothing could stay the fight now that the smouldering wrath of years of wrong had flamed into the mad fury of the moment, and when the wild passions of both sides had been roused.

Volna joined her voice to mine and urged him.

But in his frenzy of emotional remorse, he paid no heed to us. "Don't you see that all this horror is the result of what I in my blindness have been doing?" he cried. "The thought of it is torment and the sight of it hell. Would you have me skulk here to save my skin when an effort now may stop further bloodshed?"

With that he rushed out.

He went first among the strikers, and we saw him advising, arguing, urging, pleading, commanding in turn with no effect. Those whom he addressed listened to him at first with a measure of patience but afterwards with shrugs, sullen looks, intolerant gestures, and at last with stubborn, angry resentment at his interference, or jeers and flouts according to their humour.

And all this time the preparations were not stayed a second but hurried forward with feverish haste and vengeful lust of fight.

At length, I saw him thrust aside roughly, almost savagely, by one burly fellow who had been building the barricade and now stood gripping a heavy iron crowbar and wiping the sweat from his brow.

This act served as a cue for the rest. Ladislav was passed from hand to hand, and pushed with jibes and oaths, from the centre of the barricade to the pavement.

For an instant he tried a last appeal to the men about him; but their only reply was a jeering laugh, half contemptuous, half angry, but wholly indifferent to every word he uttered.

Just then a loud command from the officer in charge of the troops was given and the soldiers advanced a few paces and levelled their guns.

In a moment Ladislav had climbed over the barricade and rushed forward into the space between the troops and the mob. He ran forward with uplifted hand.

"For the love of God, peace," he cried to the officer, his voice clear and strong above the din. "No more blood must be shed."

For an instant a silence fell upon both sides, and all eyes were fixed upon him.

The next, a single shot was fired from among the ranks of the troops.

Ladislav's uplifted hand dropped. He staggered, and turned toward the mob, so that all saw by the red mark on his white, broad forehead where the bullet had struck him, and fell huddled up on the road.

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It was the signal for the fight to break loose. A wild, deep groan of execration leapt from every throat behind the barricade, followed by shouts and cries of defiance. His fall at the hands of the troops had raised him to the place of martyr; and those who had been quick to jeer him now shrieked and yelled for vengeance upon his murderers.

Surely an irony of fate that he who had given his life in the cause of peace should by his death have loosed the wildest passion for blood.

A ghastly scene followed. As the soldiers charged the barricade, the mob offered a stubborn and desperate resistance. Many of them were shot down, but there were others ready to take their places. Time after time the troops reached and mounted the barricade only to be driven back. Once they carried it, and commenced to charge the crowd behind; but they were outnumbered many times, and the mob beat them, and hurled them back and pursued them even across the barricade, inflicting serious loss.

I seized that moment to run out and recover the body of my poor friend. I found him; and as I was carrying him out of the press of the tumult, the troops rallied, and the tide of the fight came surging back past me.

The chances of the struggle brought Bremenhof close up. He saw me, and with a cry of anger rushed to seize me.

Some of the mob had seen my effort to get Ladislav away. One of them had stayed to help and he

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was thus close at hand when the attempt was made to capture me. Thinking that the intention was to prevent my carrying Ladislav away, he pressed forward and with a savage oath thrust his revolver right in Bremenhof's face and fired.

This act proved the turning point in the fight.

Fierce shouts of exultation went up as Bremenhof was recognized. The strikers halted, rallied and reformed, and they renewed the attack upon the troops with irresistible vigour and drove them back helter-skelter in all directions.

The mob had won; but at a cost which had yet to be counted. Nor did they stay to count it. The street resounded with whoops and yells of victory. Flushed and sweated with their exertions, the men were like children in their delight. They shook hands one with another, and laughed and sang and shouted and even danced in sheer glee.

They had beaten the troops; had sent them scurrying like frightened hares to cover; they had carried the cause of the people to triumph; they had spilt the blood of the oppressor; and the taste of it made them drunk with the joy of the new found power and strength.

Some one started the Polish national air. The strain was caught up and echoed by a thousand deep-toned, tuneful voices with an impression to be remembered to one's dying hour.

A crowd came round me as I stood by the two dead bodies.

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Bremenhof's corpse was kicked and cursed and spat upon, till I sickened at the sight.

Ladislav was lifted and borne away, with the care and honour due to a martyr, to the strains of the national air. The revolution had begun in terrible earnestness; and that day's fight was its baptism of blood.

As the men bore Ladislav away, I went back to Volna to tell her the grim news and get her away to a place of safety.

CHAPTER XXX

AFTER THE STORM

THE death of Colonel Bremenhof caused a profound sensation; and the most varied and contradictory reports were circulated about it.

The authorities branded it assassination, and threatened the most rigorous punishment of those whom they deemed the murderers.

The members of the Fraternity were charged with responsibility for it; and were declared to have laid a deep and far-reaching plot to destroy him as one of the chief executive leaders of the government.

The strikers were jubilant over the event. He had fallen in fair fight, they alleged, when leading the police and soldiers to attack peaceful citizens; and his death was hailed as triumph and encouragement to their cause.

In fact almost every conceivable reason was given—except the truth.

There were a few who looked a little deeper for the cause; and among these was my old friend General von Eckerstein.

Three days after the outbreak of the riots I called to bid him good-bye, and I found him deeply impressed and full of interested speculation about the matter.

“What beats me, Bob, is what business he had

to get into the thick of a street fight," he said. "He must have been mad. From what I have heard, his whole conduct that day was more than eccentric."

"Wasn't it his duty, then?" I asked casually.

"Duty? What! To go out and fight the mob? What do you suppose the ordinary police and soldiers are for?"

"He must have had some private motive then."

He turned on me like a flash. "What do you mean? Do you know anything?"

"No, nothing officially."

"Good Heavens! where have you been the last few days; since you were here?"

"I told you just now that I returned to the city this midday, to see the last of my poor friend Ladislas. He was buried about the same time as Bremenhof. Ladislas' funeral was not nearly so imposing a ceremony, but there was vastly more genuine grief."

"Oh, nobody liked Bremenhof as a man; but that so high an official should have fallen in such a way! But you—where were you on Monday?"

"I stayed at the *Vladimir* on Sunday night and left Warsaw on Monday evening."

"And all that day?" he asked with a very sharp look.

"Oh, I was moving about in different parts of the city."

"Did you see that fight in the street of St. Gregory?"

"Yes, amongst other things."

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"Do you mean you know what took Bremenhof there?"

I nodded. "He was after me as a matter of fact. It's a pretty bad tangle, but if you haven't got your official ears open, I'll tell you." I told him enough to make the matter clear.

"And after that you dare to shew your face in Warsaw? Are you mad, boy?"

"There is no daring about it because there's no risk. There was only one man who knew me in the affair—the police spy, Burski; and he has his own, right enough. He was playing spy at a meeting of the strikers on Tuesday night; and one of the men who was in the house at the place of St. John recognized him. He was a fellow of resource and iron nerve, and tried to brazen it out that he was a Fraternity man. But he failed."

"You mean?"

"They lynched him then and there."

"The infernal villains!"

"If it comes to that Bremenhof, who was buried to-day with full military honours, wasn't much to boast of."

"If you're going to turn revolutionary you'd better get out of the city and be off home. Luck like yours won't last, boy."

"I'm going. I've done nothing except checkmate a scoundrel. Given the same circumstances, I'd try it again."

He looked at me with a half whimsical smile. "Where is she, Bob?"

"Not so far from Warsaw as I hope she soon will be, General."

"You got her out of the city then?"

"Oh, yes, without much difficulty. When the crowd got the upper hand in the street fight it was easy for us to get away. I drove with her to the place where Madame Drakona had been sent. Then I hurried to the *Vladimir* and put on the police uniform which Burski had brought me. That, coupled with the special authority I got out of Bremenhof and helped by a blunt discourteous official manner, made things easy. I could have taken a train load of women out of Warsaw. Two were a mere detail."

"Do you understand the fearful risk you've run?"

"One doesn't always stop to consider that. Things have to be done and one does them first and thinks afterwards. Besides, I had a good object."

"What do you mean?" He asked this very curtly.

I smiled. "It was in the cause of freedom."

"In the cause of fiddlesticks. What's Poland's freedom to you, that you should risk your life for it?"

"Nothing."

He started and his eyes brightened meaningly.

"Oh, I see. The freedom of the girl, eh?"

"Isn't it a good enough cause for me?"

"I suppose you think so," he said drily. "Are

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you in a fit state now to take an old diplomat's advice?"

"Yes; if I agree with it, of course."

"Oh, of course. Well, it's this. Get out of Warsaw and out of Russia, and stay out."

"Haven't I come to bid you good-bye? Give me credit for something. I'm going by the next train."

"Where?"

I laughed. "I like the rural districts of Poland. I'm going first to Solden. Do you know the neighbourhood?"

"Solden? What in the name of——oh, is she there?"

I nodded. "At Kervatje, a few miles' drive from there."

"But the police of Solden know you both. They brought you here."

"There is nothing against either of us now. Bremenhof's death has made all the difference. The evidence against Madame Drakona has been destroyed, and the charge against her daughter was never made officially. There's no one now to make it."

"Arrests are being made wholesale, boy, with or without charges, in consequence of his death. Where are the brother and sister?"

"I don't know, and I daren't make any inquiries."

"Oh, there is something you daren't do, then?"

I don't like the thing, Bob, and that's the truth. Look here, I'm going through to Berlin to-morrow; stay here till then and travel with me. I shall know you're out of mischief then."

"I should like it but—well, the fact is, you see, I shan't be travelling alone."

He laughed drily. "As bad as that, eh?"

"Yes, if you call it bad. I don't."

"Are your papers in order? Your passports?"

I shook my head. "My own is, but not the rest."

"How do you want it worded?" he asked with another grin.

"Oh, the usual way, whatever that is," I said a little sheepishly.

"Robert Anstruther and——"

"Laugh away. Can you help me?"

"Give it me. Even I don't know how a man carries his mother-in-law on his own passport."

"It is a bit awkward; but I don't want a hitch now."

"Look here, boy. I'll stretch a point for you. I'll go by way of Cracow and will pick you up at Solden to-morrow. I'm travelling special, and you shall all go through in my saloon;" and scarcely waiting to listen to my thanks he hurried me off to the station, sending his secretary with me to make sure that no difficulties were raised about my departure.

At Solden I found Volna in a sleigh waiting for

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me. Her face lighted and she welcomed me with a glad smile.

"You wonder to see me; but I was so anxious I could not stay at Kervatje."

"I have very little news."

"Do you think it was only the news?"

"What else?"

"Bob!"

"You're getting quite pat with that name, now."

"Peggy had to learn it, you see."

"And Volna?"

"Volna felt like rushing off to Warsaw when that train was so late," she replied earnestly.

"I like that answer; but there was no cause for anxiety, I'm glad to say. Our troubles are over. To-morrow afternoon we shall be in Cracow."

"I had a brother once who used to say that," she said, with a laugh and a glance.

"Are you sorry you've lost him?"

She answered by slipping her hand into my arm and nestling a little closer to me. We sat for a time in the sympathetic silence of mutual happiness and perfect understanding, listening to the rhythmic music of the sleigh bells as the three horses glided rapidly over the snow.

Then I told her of my old friend's promise to see us safely to Cracow in his saloon.

"Will there be any one else there?"

"I don't know. Some of his staff, perhaps."

"It will be a little trying," she said, with a show of dismay.

"Why?"

"As if you didn't know. Think of the ordeal for me."

"You've faced much worse things bravely enough. Besides, you won't be alone: You'll have your——"

"Bob!" she interposed quickly, with a lovely blush.

"Your mother with you. Mayn't I say that?"

"You were not going to say that."

"What was I going to say?"

"Volna has all Peggy's instincts, remember."

"Well, I challenge you to say what you think I meant."

"I'm not in a fighting mood to accept challenges."

"I dare you to say it, then."

"Don't be a coward, Bob."

"I'll say it then. You'll have your——"

"Bob."

"It's quite true. If you keep your promise of two days ago, and Father Ambrose does his duty to-morrow. I shall be——"

"There's the way to Cracow; do you recognize it?" she cried quickly, as we reached the forked roads of which Father Ambrose had told us.

"That's the way a brother and sister went; but this one to-morrow a man and his——"

"How lucky we were not to have the snow that time, weren't we?" she broke in again.

"That wasn't the real luck in my eyes. My luck

was when I lost my sister and found in her place my——"

She held up her hand, laughing and blushing vividly. "If you do, I'll——"

"Then I'll wait until Father Ambrose has said it."

"I shan't mind then. Oh, Bob, won't it be lovely!" and she laughed and squeezed my arm, and pressed her head against my shoulder.

All of which no doubt sounds very much like foolishness. It goes to shew that we were very young of course, very really in love, and very happy after our strenuous time. As happy indeed as any two young people could wish to be who were to be made man and wife within a few hours. In those hours a deal of happiness is just so much foolishness.

In one thing Volna was wrong. It was no ordeal that awaited her on the journey with the General to Cracow.

At her first glance he fell before her; and by the time we reached Cracow he was almost as much in love with her as I was.

During the journey he shewed such tact, too. He devoted most of his time to Volna's mother; and having told her he had learnt that Katinka and Paul had left Warsaw and gone to Vienna, he kept her talking most of the time in one corner of the saloon, while Volna and I were alone in another.

When we parted at Cracow he took Volna's two hands and pressed them, and smiled as he said

tenderly, and very earnestly: "I can understand Bob now that I've seen you. You were just made to be loved as I know he loves you, my dear."

And to me, drawing me aside: "I told you yesterday your luck wouldn't last, boy. I take that back. I pray God it may; and that you may always be worthy of it. Good-bye, boy."

THE END

At her first glance he fell before her; and by the time we reached Carrow he was almost as much in love with her as I was.

During the journey he showed such tact, too. He devoted us all the time to Volia's mother; and having told her he had heard that Katinka and Paul had left Warsaw and come to Vienna, he kept her talking most of the time in one corner of the saloon, while Volia and I were alone in another.

When we parted at Carrow he took Volia's two hands and pressed them, and smiled as he said